

Senate Executive Departments and Administration Committee

Ben Mickens 271-1403

HB 1705-FN, establishing an employee assistance program for small town and volunteer first responders.

Hearing Date: April 14, 2026

Time Opened: 10:13 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:31 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Pearl and Altschiller

Members of the Committee Absent : Senators Gannon, Lang and Reardon

Bill Analysis: This bill establishes a fund to cover the costs of enrolling and supporting first responders from small communities into the state-provided employee assistance program (EAP) and outlines eligibility, enrollment, and reporting requirements for the department of health and human services.

Sponsors:

Rep. Selig
Rep. Newell

Rep. Damon
Sen. Prentiss

Rep. Drye

Who supports the bill: Representative Loren Selig, Representative Jerry Stringham, Representative Janet Lucas, Representative Margaret Drye, Representative Jodi Newell, Heather Barber, Annie Rettew, Sandy Hudson, Laura Vincent, Pat Wilczynski, Stacey Boston, Mary Duncan, Reverend Alexandra Boudreaux, Sarah Anderson, Lisa Hall, Julie Harris, Betsy Neville, Lauren Wilson,

Who opposes the bill:

Who is neutral on the bill: Michael Lawless (DHHS), and John William (DHHS).

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Loren Selig

- Representative Selig explained her work to utilize theater to manage issues such as PTSD in first responders.
- Representative Selig explained that in her work, first responders continued to bring up how the major issue is repeated trauma not just one instance.
- Representative Selig stated the further one goes out into the state the harder it is to access care for first responders.

- Representative Selig expressed how a first responder she spoke to was able to call the EAP line and get help. This led to the idea to find the least expensive and most effective way to get greater access to care for first responders.
- Representative Selig stated that there are huge potential costs if volunteer first responders left their work and towns had to hire replacements.
- Representative Selig also gave testimony from Representative Damon

Representative Margaret Drye

- Representative Drye explained that she works as a volunteer first responder.
- Representative Drye recounted her experience helping another local volunteer first responder after discovering he did not get access to EAP.
- Representative Drye stated that the amendment, which allows for the collection of donations and grants, makes the program viable.

Representative Jodi Newell

- Representative Newell explained that the bill was a thank you to first responders who put their lives on the line.
- Representative Newell told the story of she and her children experiencing a fire in their home. She also told the story of a recent house fire in Troy. Representative Newell underlined the important of first responders to keeping families and communities safe.

Representative Jerry Stringham

- Representative Stringham explained that, as an employer, he has always offered EAP.
- Representative Stringham stated that the legislation was low cost and effective.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition: None.

Neutral Information Presented:

John Williams, *Legislative Affairs Director*, DHHS

- Director Williams stated that DHHS does not take a position, however, wants to ensure budgetary concerns and has a contingent amendment to help address these concerns.

BM

Date Hearing Report completed: April 14, 2026