

March 23, 2023

Representative Dacia Grayber, Chair
House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street
Salem, Or 97301

RE: HB 3426

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs, and Esteemed Committee Members:

My name is Brian Smith, and I am the Strategic Services Chief for Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue (TVF&R). On behalf of TVF&R, thank you for considering HB 3426. We are supportive of this legislation as it will expand more effective and potentially lifesaving assistance to firefighters and other first responders when they find themselves experiencing a mental health crisis.

TVF&R serves over 500,000 people in eleven cities and parts of Washington, Clackamas, Yamhill, and Multnomah counties. Over 450 TVF&R firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics respond to about 50,000 calls for service every year. We, like other first responders, proudly respond whenever we are called—without hesitation or thought to how our job might impact our mental health.

As a firefighter/paramedic with over 28 years in Oregon's Fire Service, I know firsthand the cumulative impact our stressful and demanding job has on our mental well-being. Unfortunately, anxiety, depression, addiction, PTSD, and suicide are very real struggles for many first responders, as they are for military veterans. It is known that firefighters experience higher rates of suicide than does the general population.

In the very near future, calling 988 will be the predominant way Oregonians can access support and resources when experiencing a mental health crisis. Firefighters and first responders will need and use the 988 system. The 988 system is important because it improves access to essential, supportive resources. We support HB 3426 because it will make an already good 988 system better by making it more responsive to the distinctive mental health needs of firefighters and all first responders.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brian Smith
Strategic Services Chief

SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY