	Abilene Police Department Operating Procedures		
	Subject: Mental Health Leave for Peace Officers	Issued: 04/01/2022	TBP:

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to allow mental health leave for peace officers employed by the Department who experience a traumatic event while on duty.

Definitions

Traumatic Event – an incident that occurs within a peace officer’s scope of employment when the officer is involved in the response to, or the investigation of, an incident that causes the officer to experience unusually strong emotional reactions or feelings, which have the potential to interfere with the ability to perform their duties during or after the incident.

Traumatic Event(s) include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A. Major disasters, which may include a response to weather related events with multiple casualties, explosions with multiple casualties, or search and recovery missions with multiple casualties;
- B. Incidents involving multiple casualties, which may include shootings or traffic accidents;
- C. Line of duty death or suicide of a Department member;
- D. Death of a child resulting from violence or neglect;
- E. Officer(s) involved shooting of a person; or
- F. Any other incident as determined by the Chief of Police.

Mental Health Leave – paid administrative leave provided by the Department in response to a Traumatic Event that occurred within the scope of the peace officer’s employment.

Mental Health Professional – a licensed social or mental health worker, counselor, psychotherapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.


Applicability

This policy applies to licensed peace officers employed by the Department.

Conditions

An officer who is directly involved in a Traumatic Event may request Mental Health Leave up to one (1) calendar year after the Traumatic Event occurred. An officer shall be permitted a maximum of three (3) scheduled work days of Mental Health Leave per calendar year, subject to the following conditions, and the Mental Health Leave is:

- A. Approved by the Chief of Police or his/her designee;
- B. Ordered by a Mental Health Professional; and
- C. Taken because of a Traumatic Event that occurred while on duty.

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Requesting Mental Health Leave

An officer who is directly involved in a Traumatic Event may request Mental Health Leave. The request shall be made in writing, through the officer’s chain of command. The request shall be treated by Police Administration as a priority matter, and a decision to grant or deny the request shall be made within twenty-four (24) hours of submission of the request. The request shall be granted, unless the Chief of Police can articulate specific, compelling reasons to deny the request.

If another member of the Department becomes aware of behavioral changes in an officer who is directly involved in a Traumatic Event, they should suggest to the officer that he/she seek Mental Health Leave and assistance from a Mental Health Professional.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The Department shall keep requests for Mental Health Leave, and any medical information related to Mental Health Leave under this policy, confidential to the extent allowed by law and separate from the officer’s civil service personnel file, or A file. Any request for Mental Health Leave shall be treated as strictly confidential by all parties involved and shall not be discussed or disclosed outside the officer’s immediate chain of command, and only as necessary to facilitate the use of Mental Health Leave. Other members of the Department who become aware of behavioral changes and suggest that the officer seek Mental Health Leave shall not discuss the matter with any third party; however, supervisor(s) shall report it directly to the Chief of Police.


Any breach of this confidentiality shall be grounds for discipline. Confidentiality may not be required under certain circumstances, such as those that indicate the officer is a danger to him/herself or others. In such circumstances, Department personnel shall confer with Mental Health Professionals. The officer seeking Mental Health Leave may waive confidentiality.

Documentation related to a request for Mental Health Leave should be maintained in the Department’s internal personnel file pursuant to TLGC §143.089(g), or G file.

Duration of Mental Health Leave

Extensions of Mental Health Leave may be granted under certain circumstances. A request for an extension shall be submitted to the Chief of Police and Human Resources, and shall be accompanied by documentation from a Mental Health Professional indicating the need for an extension. The documentation shall be submitted by the end of the third Mental Health Leave day. If the request for an extension is granted, an officer may receive up to three (3) additional working days of leave.

An officer may request no more than two (2) extensions. Each request shall be supported by sufficient documentation by the Mental Health Professional. Human Resources shall inform the Chief of Police when sufficient documentation has been received explaining the need for the

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Mental Health Leave extension. The Chief of Police or his/her designee may grant the extension(s) upon notice from Human Resources.

In order to provide anonymity of the officer, the hours away from work shall be noted on the timesheet as regular hours; however, notes shall be placed in the Peace Officer's confidential medical file to provide a record of time away, as well a historical record that the Mental Health Leave extension was granted.

If the Chief of Police becomes concerned about an officer's mental fitness to continue his/her duties, the Chief of Police shall coordinate with the Director of Human Resources to consult with Mental Health Professionals in order to ensure the safety and well-being of the officer, the Department members, and the community.

Effect on Paid Leave Balances

The Department may not reduce an eligible officer's sick leave, vacation leave, holiday, or other paid leave balance(s) for Mental Health Leave taken under this policy.

Mental Health Services Available to Officers

Officers may use the Department's Employee Victim Advocates Office. All information shall be kept confidential.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The City of Abilene offers a confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a benefit to all employees and their immediate family members at no cost for professional assistance in dealing with issues that may affect and/or hinder their job performance. Detailed information on available resources can be found in the Employee Policy Manual. The following services are available through EAP:

- A. Counseling sessions – up to five (5) sessions per problem per year;
- B. LawAccess – legal and financial services;
- C. HelpNet – customized EAP website with resource tools;
- D. WorkLife – resources for everyday needs; and
- E. SafeRide – reimbursement for emergency cab fare to prevent driving while impaired.

Mental Health Service Provider Health Care/Serious Mental Illness/Treatment of Substance Abuse Disorder Coverage Benefits

- A. Inpatient Services – Hospital Services (facility) and Behavioral Practitioner Services.
- B. Outpatient Services – Behavioral Health Practitioner Expenses.
- C. Mental Health/Substance Abuse Use Disorder Preauthorization Helpline available.