

Perfect partners: Cop2Cop and the NJ Resiliency Program for Law Enforcement



CHERIE
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Cop2Cop

After 20 years of working at Cop2Cop, it is clear to me that more needs to be done to support law enforcement officers and their families in New Jersey. Our retired officers who are peer support counselors, trainers and debriefing experts are wonderful, but they are not with you or your departments, in your communities, on a daily basis.

There is a need to build on what is strong, not only what is wrong, now in our law enforcement community. So on Aug. 6, I was honored to introduce our attorney general, who announced the exciting new initiative known as the New Jersey Resiliency Program for Law Enforcement (NJRP-LE).

Addressing the rise in reported police suicides nationwide, Attorney General Grewal issued a law enforcement directive — known as the “Officer Resiliency Directive” — implementing NJRP-LE, a first-in-the-nation statewide program to train officers in resiliency and to become better equipped to handle the daily stress of police work that, when left unchecked, may lead to physical ailments, depression and burnout.

In so doing, New Jersey will become the first state in the country to require that all state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies designate a Resiliency Program Officer (RPO) who will be specifically trained in — and ultimately train their departments in — resiliency.

As part of the directive, Attorney General Grewal announced the creation of a chief resiliency officer, who will be responsible for ensuring implementation of the statewide program. Attorney General Grewal announced that he had selected Robert Czepiel, chief of the Prosecutors Supervision and Training Bureau in the Division of Criminal Justice, as the state’s first-ever chief resiliency officer. Chief Czepiel will be responsible for overseeing the statewide program.

We also know at Cop2Cop that there is a mind-body connection, which is why we secured a grant to do peer health coaching on the phone, in addition to the Reciprocal Peer Support Counseling already provided when you call 866-267-2267.

The NJRP-LE project also recognizes that job stress puts law enforcement officers at higher risk for health and social issues such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, substance misuse, family and relationship stress and self-harm. NJRP-LE is designed to change a culture in which officers are often reluctant to seek help for work-related stress. The program fosters an environment that encourages officers to communicate with each other and with their families.

Rather than “spiraling down,” officers are provided with techniques and services that help them to “spiral up” and meet day-to-day challenges. The program emphasizes officers’ positive strengths, rather than their weaknesses. Based upon the belief that people are not born resilient but rather learn to be resilient

through life experiences, NJRP-LE promotes and encourages a growth mindset, as opposed to a restrictive fixed mindset.

NJRP-LE is not designed to replace already existing programs, such as the Cop2Cop, that provide peer support and referral structure for officers in need or in crisis. Instead, it is designed to work in tandem with these programs by widening the net to cover all law enforcement officers, not just those in crisis or need.

As the director of Cop2Cop for 20 years and the wife of a law enforcement professional, I firmly believe this innovative program provides a much-needed service that our police community deserves. Law enforcement suicide prevention is fostered by building strength, as well as by responding to crisis needs. This project will create a needed continuum of law enforcement peer support. Resiliency officers in every community will partner to hand off to Cop2Cop for telephone-based peer support with our retired officer peer counselors and clinicians, ensuring assessment and referral to our Cop2Cop provider network as needed.

In addition, we can refer our Cop2Cop callers to an RPO from their community who can meet with them face to face. Both options offer ongoing peer support and a strength-based approach to preserving our most precious resource in New Jersey — our law enforcement officers.

NJRP-LE also recognizes that officers must feel comfortable speaking with an RPO. As a result, AG Directive 2019-1 protects the confidentiality of communications between a law enforcement officer and an RPO. The directive also encourages law enforcement agencies to use chaplain programs to promote open communication. AG Directive 2019-1 requires every law enforcement officer in the state to be trained in NJRP-LE by the end of 2022.

The training is a two-day event, with a mix of lectures and practical exercises. Pursuant to the directive, every law enforcement agency in the state must appoint at least one RPO who, once trained, will be responsible for implementing NJRP-LE in their agency. Our team at Cop2Cop designed the training to supplement the October event to launch NJRP-LE in order to encourage the “hand-off” between our groups. We want to ensure a smooth workflow, expand our existing Cop2Cop provider database and ensure a continuum of care.

Cop2Cop needed a partner to improve our service, and the RPOs are the perfect fit!

We are grateful to NJSPBA President Pat Colligan for his role in supporting this new innovation for members.