

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number:	26-279	Meeting:	August 3, 2026
	Agenda Item:	37	Roll Call:	26-0902
	Submitted by:	Mike McTaggart, Chief of Police		

AGENDA HEADING:

Approval of applying for funding through the FY2026 Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act (LEMHWA) grant program.

SYNOPSIS:

The Des Moines Police Department recommends approval to apply for funding through the FY2026 COPS Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Grant program. The LEMHWA grant funds are used to improve the delivery of and access to mental health and wellness services for law enforcement officers through the implementation of peer support, training, family resources, suicide prevention, and other promising practices for wellness programs. Good mental and psychological health is just as essential as good physical health for law enforcement officers to be effective in keeping our communities safe from crime and violence.

The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act (LEMHWA) program supports efforts to protect the mental health and well-being of law enforcement officers through funding the implementation of a new or the enhancement of existing programs that offer training and services on officer emotional and mental health such as peer mentoring, suicide prevention, stress reduction, and police officer family services. Unfortunately, stress of officers' work and the stigmatism associated with seeking assistance for emotional and mental health issues has led to negative consequences such as divorce, alcoholism, injury, and even an increase in suicides for officers across the country.

The police department is applying for funds to support the expansion of the Peer Support Team from 35 to 50 members with the necessary training to be certified by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. This foundation offers a variety of training to increase Peer Support Teams abilities to effectively provide services to police department personnel affected by critical incidents. The team's duties are voluntary; however, additional overtime is necessary to ensure there are enough support team members available during a large event. The overtime will be paid through the grant if awarded. To effectively manage the team's response and collect data on the team's activities, the department is also requesting the purchase of a software program that will integrate with the existing Computer Aided Dispatch system (CAD) and the Records Management system.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Amount: \$105,881

Funding Source: FY2027 Recommended Operating Budget, printed page 190 Special Revenues

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- First responders are frequently confronted by stressful situations and exposed to some of the most negative elements in life such as horrific scenes, human carnage, violence, extreme emotional grief, pain, and trauma. This exposure can leave a lasting impression and increase stress, feelings of hopelessness, and depression. 54% more law enforcement officers commit suicide than the general public. (Relief Mental Health) First responders can remove their uniforms but are unable to turn off their memories or the flashbacks of what they have seen or experienced while on duty. They often internalize their emotions, not wanting others to know they are suffering side effects of high stress. This can lead to substance abuse, physical ailments, and feelings of isolation. They often are not comfortable sharing with family members what they have experienced. They wish to protect them from the graphic horror of the job and not cause them additional worry and stress. Unfortunately, the side effects of high stress have a ripple effect throughout the departments, the responders' families and the community. Individuals who are in constant contact with a first responder may also demonstrate similar feelings of hopelessness and depression.
- There are other positions whose overlapping duties with first responders, can also experience a high level of stress resulting from their daily duties. For example, Emergency Dispatchers. They are often exposed to horrific and graphic images through video submissions to Emergency 911. They receive hundreds of calls and texts every shift with reports of medical emergencies, vehicle accidents and reports of crime. (204,200 calls in 2025) The high volume supports an increase in stress because they don't know whether the call relates to a life-threatening situation or if it is a request for information. They are often stunned/shocked by the sounds of violence, tragedy and suffering transmitted through their headset during their response to emergency-related calls. The dispatcher must remain calm and gather information from a distraught individual, who is often in a high energy or panicked emotional state. They must quickly evaluate the described situation and quickly determine which first response services are required. However, the dispatcher is left without closure or knowledge of how the situation was resolved. There is also the added stress of knowing they are dispatching their colleagues into a potentially dangerous situation.
- Additionally, Crime Scene Investigators who are responsible for recording/photographing crime scenes, meticulously collecting and analyzing each piece of evidence while keeping diligent notes on the process. They share elements of the same stress and negative exposure as first responders. They must photograph human remains, horrifically graphic scenes, and record gruesome details with the added pressure of tight deadlines. They must record the scene in meticulous detail with precision of measurements, angles and direction. This work is performed while they try to preserve the scene as other individuals enter and leave the scene. They must work methodically to ensure they didn't miss any small detail or piece of evidence related to the scene. They must spend hours exposed to the details of the graphic scene meticulously recording every detail and then must analyze each piece of evidence while documenting every part of the process to add to the case file. They are often called to testify to defend their analysis of the evidence and their scientific findings in detail. They must revisit the images and evidence while reliving the crime scene to provide an accurate reconstruction of the crime scene in explicate detail to be presented in court.

- The pressure, stress, exposure to negative elements, and the loss of life while performing job duties coupled with the stress of family and non-job-related obligations can become overwhelming and result in symptoms of a variation of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Stress has clinically been proven to affect individuals' mental and physical health. Studies show a decline in cognitive function, memory loss, issues falling/staying asleep, depression, and anxiety. Reluctance to reach out for professional assistance may be a result of fear related to social stigma or the fear it will negatively limit/hurt their career. Family members may misinterpret or not understand the outward sign of extreme stress and may not be aware of the effect living with an individual suffering from extreme stress has on their own health.
- By supplying Peer Support immediately following a critical incident, the department will support better departmental morale, increase employee retention and provide a more supportive work environment.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S): NONE

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S): NONE

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

- Possible acceptance of the grant award.

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