

# Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE June 4, 2021

TO Honorable Members of the Public Safety Committee

SUBJECT **Dallas Fire-Rescue's Resiliency Program**

Dallas Fire-Rescue's (DFR) Resiliency Program is designed to promote preventative mental health skills, improve awareness of mental and behavioral health problems, and ensure that appropriate resources and referrals are available for all DFR employees. We recognize that stress and crisis can impact all members regardless of assignment, but we are especially concerned about the chronic stressors and acute trauma exposures that first responders encounter, over the course of their careers and into retirement. Since 2017, following the death of a firefighter by suicide, DFR has been working to formally build a proactive program, focused on all aspects of wellness, in order to reduce the need for the reactive resources that we have in place like Critical Incident Stress Management, Peer Support, the Chaplaincy program, and the City-sponsored Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The Resiliency Program operates as part of the Safety and Performance Division of DFR and began in 2018, with the delivery of three modules (Resilience, Sleep, and Mindset Intervention) to recruits during their initial firefighter training. DFR has a certified *HeartMath* instructor who teaches these courses; *HeartMath* is a biofeedback tool that can be used by recruits and firefighters to reduce test anxiety and improve operational focus during emergency situations. These courses have been delivered to approximately 600 recruits since the beginning of 2018. And, we have plans to incorporate these interventions at different career transitions (from firefighter to officer, from field to staff operations, after disciplinary suspensions or re-hiring, and at retirement).

During the same timeframe, DFR added mental health screenings to its Wellness Exams to confidentially evaluate members for depression, anxiety, substance abuse disorders, and sleep apnea. These screenings take place using the Department's medical provider and are used as points of discussion when the firefighter meets with the physician to go over the results of his/her exam.

In January 2021, DFR hired a Unified Resiliency Coordinator (URC), using a grant and in partnership with the Dallas Police Department. In this short time, the URC has worked with DFR staff to reduce the stigma associated with mental health among its members, and has, in numerous cases, provided safe, effective, and confidential advice and referrals for employees and their families. Currently, the URC is doing station and other work group visits to increase awareness of mental health issues and to highlight the resources that are available to members, should they need assistance.

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In April and May 2021, over 300 front-line, uniformed supervisors attended DFR Resiliency Workshops. These 8-hour training days were designed to give Captains and Lieutenants 1) professional development focused on supporting themselves and their teams through chronic and critical situations, 2) the ability to improve their leadership skills by understanding how to engage appropriate resources to help their co-workers, and 3) a "playbook" binder, full of vetted and culturally-specific resources and tools that can help build resiliency and promote recovery.

DFR is excited about future plans to further develop our Resiliency Program. Currently, transition meetings are being held to formally identify the URC as the liaison to the volunteer led DFR Peer Support and Critical Incident Stress Management teams. This will ensure adequate financial support, oversight, and information sharing, and officially recognizes the importance of these two teams and their role in supporting our members' well-being. Both groups are dedicated to strengthening our ties to DFR retirees and incorporating their service as Peer Supporters and Critical Incident Stress Team members.

A series of family-focused education seminars are planned for DFR employees for the fall of 2021. These are designed to promote awareness about the mental and behavioral health problems that first responders may face during their career and into retirement. Specifically, warning signs of crisis and conversation starters will be topics of discussion. The class will also provide detailed instructions on who to contact for assistance and how to get help, for both employees and their family members.

The DFR Resiliency Program is designed to support our employees while they are serving others. If you have any questions, please contact me.



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