

## **V. Other Subject Matters Considered by the Commission**

Executive Order 2020-11 directs that the Commission shall examine any “subject matter which the Commission deems relevant to the overall mission of enhancing transparency, accountability, and community relations in law enforcement.” Executive Order 2020-11, at ¶ 3 (d).

As Director Scippa testified, in February 2019 the Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant conducted a Performance Audit of NH PSTC. The audit resulted in sixteen recommendations for improvements, fourteen of which NH PSTC wholly concurred with and two of which NH PSTC partially concurred with. Director John Scippa repeatedly spoke of NH PSTC’s desire to comply with the recommendations and the funding needed for such compliance. A copy of the audit appears in the Appendix.

Over the course of its work, the Commission heard testimony from Kenneth Norton, Executive Director of the New Hampshire Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and others who highlighted that mental illness is a facet in many interactions between law enforcement officers and individuals. Director Norton is a member of this Commission. He submitted written testimony which is part of the record. Law enforcement officers are often called upon to deal with issues stemming from mental health and/or substance use because the individual requesting help has no other available resources. Law enforcement officers are not trained as mental health professionals and are often not equipped to handle such volatile situations.

The topic law enforcement officers’ mental well-being and its impact on an officer’s ability to effectively carry out his or her duties was also discussed. Law enforcement officers respond to and are exposed to traumatic events on a regular basis often with little to no time to process one tragic event before being sent to another incident. Police suicides are more widely discussed now, but for many years, and still for many officers, the topic of mental health issues was taboo in law enforcement.

### **a. Summary of Public Testimony Received by the Commission**

#### **i. Specific Recommendations Submitted by the Public**

#### **b. Commission Recommendations**

The Commission makes the following recommendations for reforms and improvements with respect to mental health and well-being and the results of the February 2019 Office of Legislative Budget Assistant NH PSTC Performance Audit.

1. Specially trained mental health professionals should be embedded in tactical response teams. There should be a review to determine if such mental health professionals will be afforded protection from litigation stemming from their participation in such activities.

2. Encourage partnerships between communities and local law enforcement to pursue services and resources dedicated to individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) and mental illness and to make those services readily available in order to reduce the burden on law enforcement responding to issues stemming from SUDs as well as mental illness.
3. Endorse the findings and recommendations of the February 2019 Office of Legislative Budget Assistant NH PSTC Performance Audit and ensure that sufficient funding is allocated to implement and sustain the recommendations.
4. Offer training regarding the mental well-being of law enforcement officers. Training should include information regarding the high rates of post-traumatic stress, depression and suicide among law enforcement officers and available resources for seeking help. Enhance the availability and encourage the continued collaboration of law enforcement peer support programs in the state.
5. NH PSTC should explore the issue of requiring mandatory periodic psychological screenings of law enforcement officers, similar to what is currently required for physical fitness under Pol 404.07, to determine ongoing fitness for duty and/or assist with referring officers for mental health treatment/support.
6. The University of New Hampshire and other higher education institutions within New Hampshire are encouraged to collaborate with NH PSTC to develop specialized curriculum and/or graduate/post graduate certificate programs dedicated:
  - a. For mental health providers who collaborate with law enforcement officers in responding to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis in order to respond more effectively to critical incidents involving individuals who are a danger to themselves or others.
  - b. To address the special mental health needs of law enforcement officers/first responders including, trauma, depression, and substance misuse, in order to enhance the skills, understanding, and availability of licensed mental health professionals in New Hampshire who can provide treatment/support and collaborate with our law enforcement community.
7. Strongly encourage the legislature to allocate appropriate funding for those recommendations and services adopted as a result of this Commission.