

Exeter Police Stakeholders Committee (EPSC) Meeting April 6, 2021, at
3:00 pm, via Zoom

Minutes

Attendance: Committee Members- Katie Adams, Elliott Berkowitz, Matt Carbone, Emily Heath, Harry King, Anne Surman, and Darius Thompson. Select Board Reps.- Daryl Brown and Molly Cowan. Exeter Police Department (EPD)- Chief Stephan Poulin, Deputy Chief Michael Munk, Detective Bruce Page. Bob Glowacky and Garrett Pray, IT Tech/EXTV, and Guest Speaker – Nicole L. Sawyer, PsyD, PLLC, 14 Hampton Road, Exeter, NH. [Note: Committee members Alexis Simpson and Tanisha Johnson were not present due to prior commitments.]

1. Chair Anne Surman called the meeting to order and read a statement in substance: As Chair of the EPSC, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 this public body is authorized to meet electronically. Public notice of this meeting was posted, on March 31, 2021, on the town website and on the bulletin board of the town offices at 10 Front Street. As provided in that public notice, the public may access the meeting online and via phone. Please note that all votes taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote. Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting and who that person is (son, daughter, spouse, etc...), which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

2. MOTION: Matt Carbone moved to accept the minutes from the March 23rd meeting as written. **Darius Thompson seconded**. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote. [Note: Harry King's connection to the Zoom meeting had audio technical difficulties that were later resolved.]

3. Chair Surman discussed the Citizen's Survey and the work of the sub-committee consisting of Chief Poulin, Chair Surman and Vice Chair Thompson. Chair Surman mentioned that she would like to have something together from the results of the

citizen survey to share with the Exeter Board of Selectmen, on May 24, 2021, during a public meeting.

4. Chief Poulin introduced the Guest Speaker, Nicole L. Sawyer, PsyD, PLLC, 14 Hampton Road, Exeter, NH, to make a presentation concerning law enforcement officer's mental wellness. Dr. Sawyer provides psychological services for other first responders and military personnel in addition to law enforcement officers. She provides training and public awareness presentations concerning mental health related to first responders.

5. Dr. Sawyer discussed her assistance in performing pre-employment exams of EPD applicants to observe their abilities to resolve conflict, handle stress, personal integrity, use communication skills, and the applicant's psychological flexibility. Dr. Sawyer stated that there was no way to accurately test an applicant's potential biases through these exams.

6. Dr. Sawyer discussed how law enforcement officers suffer from chronic stress in the regular performance of their official duties. She mentioned that officers need to be trained in self-care and self-awareness for their emotional survival in their profession. The Doctor used the quote that law enforcement officers have "the illusion of tremendous control and the reality of none." She described an officer's job is constantly bringing on novelty work, competence in action, with a risk for threat or harm being involved in each incident.

7. Dr. Sawyer discussed both physiological and psychological responses to chronic stress caused in the law enforcement profession. She discussed both absolute and relative stress and how law enforcement officers don't necessarily feel comfortable talking about what they witness and experience, during the performance of their duties. She gave examples of how officers have difficulty maintaining mental flexibility over time and gave examples.

8. Dr. Sawyer discussed burnout, fatigue, emotional sacrifices in working shift work and in dangerous situations. She referenced that some officers suffer from compassion fatigue, and sometimes lose empathy or control when they feel hopeless and when they go into self-protection mode. She described officers

suffering from cumulative trauma as well as acute trauma when individuals are exposed to significant events or activities. Dr. Sawyer discussed her ability to conduct post incident debriefings of officers and conducting wellness consultations when requested after critical incidents. Dr. Sawyer has participated with New Hampshire's "Granite State Critical Incident Stress Management Team," during such post incident counselling.

9. Dr. Sawyer stated that she facilitates peer support, individual treatment, and sometimes fitness for duty evaluations for affected personnel due to traumatic events. She discussed the PTSD Bill in New Hampshire, RSA 281-A:2X1, that cuts red tape when officers use worker's compensation laws to assist with mental injuries. She discussed the need for "Command Staff buy-in" in order to ensure that officers are provided the proper mental health care and services. Dr. Sawyer was very complimentary of Chief Poulin and the EPD in this regard, and used EPD as an example of proper management buy-in to the mental health of their employees.

10. Dr. Sawyer affirmed that some of the trauma caused to officers during a use of force incident can be the internal investigative process conducted by the Attorney General's Office itself, as well as media coverage. She described that the investigation of an incident can sometimes be as stressful to the officer involved as the use of force action itself. She emphasized EPD's management's ability to buy into a proper mental health program in order to assist officers after critical incidents. Committee members affirmed the importance of proper mental health in all government employees working for the Town of Exeter in the performance of their official duties.

There were questions, answers and discussion by the Committee members at various points within the presentation and after.

11. There was no correspondence to read in this meeting.

12. **MOTION: Darius Thompson moved to adjourn. Matt Carbone seconded.** By a unanimous vote done via roll call, the meeting was adjourned at about 4:36 pm.

Respectfully Submitted: by Matt Carbone for Alexis Simpson, Secretary.