

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL ANALYSIS

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BILL #: [CS/HB 421](#)

TITLE: Peer Support for First Responders

SPONSOR(S): Maggard

COMPANION BILL: [CS/SB 86](#) (Burgess)

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: None

Committee References

[Criminal Justice](#)

16 Y, 0 N, As CS



[Judiciary](#)

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill adds law enforcement agency support personnel who are involved in investigating a crime scene or collecting or processing evidence to the definition of a “first responder” for the purpose of making such support personnel eligible for peer support for first responders and providing confidentiality to communications made by such support personnel while participating in peer support. As such, under the bill, specified support personnel will receive the same benefit of confidentiality with respect to peer support communications as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and other first responders.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None.

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill adds “support personnel” who are involved in investigating a crime scene or collecting or processing evidence to the definition of a “[first responder](#)” for the purpose of making such support personnel eligible for [peer support for first responders](#) and providing confidentiality to communications made by such support personnel while participating in peer support. The term “support personnel” includes any person employed or appointed by an employing agency¹ who is not an officer or, as specified by the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, other professional employee in the criminal justice system. As such, the bill extends the privilege of confidentiality for [peer support communications](#) to include communications made by support personnel employed by a law enforcement agency who are involved in investigating a crime scene or collecting or processing evidence. Under the bill, such support personnel will receive the same benefit of confidentiality with respect to peer support communications as law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, 911 public safety telecommunicators, correctional officers, and correctional probation officers. (Section [1](#)).

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2025. (Section [2](#)).

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

[Peer Support for First Responders](#)

¹ “Employing agency” means any agency or unit of government or any municipality or the state or any political subdivision thereof, or any agent thereof, which has constitutional or statutory authority to employ or appoint persons as officers. The term includes any private entity that has contracted with the state or county for the operation and maintenance of a nonjuvenile detention facility. The term also includes a Class I, Class II, or Class III railroad that employs special officers pursuant to [s. 354.01, F.S. S. 943.10\(4\), F.S.](#)

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First responders such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians are often exposed to incidents of death and destruction that can result in the development of behavioral health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicide.² To cope with the demands and stresses associated with their occupations, some first responders choose to participate in peer support. Generally, peer support involves connecting a first responder who needs support with another first responder who has behavioral health training.³

[Section 111.09, F.S.](#), defines “peer support” to mean the provision of physical, moral, or emotional support to a first responder by a first responder peer for the purpose of addressing physical or emotional conditions or other issues associated with being a first responder.⁴ Under [s. 111.09, F.S.](#), an eligible “[first responder](#)” includes a:

- Law enforcement officer.⁵
- Firefighter.⁶
- Emergency medical technician⁷ or paramedic.⁸
- 911 public safety telecommunicator.⁹
- Correctional officer.¹⁰
- Correctional probation officer.^{11, 12}

A “first responder peer” (FRP) is a person who:

- Is not a health care practitioner as defined in [s. 456.001, F.S.](#)
- Has experience working as or with a first responder, including active, volunteer, and retired first responders, regarding any physical or emotional conditions or issues associated with the first responder’s employment.
- Has been designated by the first responder’s employing agency or affiliated first responder organization to provide peer support and has received training for that purpose.¹³

² Ruderman Family Foundation, *The Ruderman White Paper on Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders*, https://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/ (last visited Mar. 7, 2025).

³ 2nd Alarm Project, *Peer Support*, <https://2ndalarmproject.org/peer-support/> (last visited Mar. 7, 2025).

⁴ [S. 111.09\(1\)\(d\), F.S.](#)

⁵ “Law enforcement officer” means any person who is elected, appointed, or employed full time by any municipality or the state or any political subdivision thereof; who is vested with authority to bear arms and make arrests; and whose primary responsibility is the prevention and detection of crime or the enforcement of the penal, criminal, traffic, or highway laws of the state. The term includes all certified supervisory and command personnel whose duties include, in whole or in part, the supervision, training, guidance, and management responsibilities of full-time law enforcement officers, part-time law enforcement officers, or auxiliary law enforcement officers *but does not include support personnel employed by the employing agency*. The term also includes a special officer employed by a Class I, Class II, or Class III railroad pursuant to [s. 354.01, F.S.](#) [S. 943.10\(1\), F.S.](#)

⁶ “Firefighter” means an individual who holds a current and valid Firefighter Certificate of Compliance or Special Certificate of Compliance issued by the Division of the State Fire Marshal within the Department of Financial Services under [s. 633.408, F.S.](#) [S. 633.102\(9\), F.S.](#)

⁷ “Emergency medical technician” means a person who is certified by the Department of Health (DOH) to perform basic life support. [S. 401.23\(12\), F.S.](#)

⁸ “Paramedic” means a person who is certified by DOH to perform basic and advanced life support. [S. 401.23\(18\), F.S.](#)

⁹ “911 public safety telecommunicator” means a public safety dispatcher or 911 operator whose duties and responsibilities include the answering, receiving, transferring, and dispatching functions related to 911 calls; dispatching law enforcement officers, fire rescue services, emergency medical services, and other public safety services to the scene of an emergency; providing real-time information from federal, state, and local crime databases; or supervising or serving as the command officer to a person or persons having such duties and responsibilities. However, the term does not include administrative support personnel, including, but not limited to, those whose primary duties and responsibilities are in accounting, purchasing, legal, and personnel. [S. 401.465\(1\), F.S.](#)

¹⁰ “Correctional officer” means any person who is appointed or employed full time by the state or any political subdivision thereof, or by any private entity which has contracted with the state or county, and whose primary responsibility is the supervision, protection, care, custody, and control, or investigation, of inmates within a correctional institution, but does not include any secretarial, clerical, or professionally trained personnel. [s. 943.10\(2\), F.S.](#)

¹¹ “Correctional probation officer” means a person who is employed full time by the state whose primary responsibility is the supervised custody, surveillance, and control of assigned inmates, probationers, parolees, or community controllees within institutions of the Department of Corrections or within the community. The term includes supervisory personnel whose duties include, in whole or in part, the supervision, training, and guidance of correctional probation officers, but excludes management and administrative personnel above, but not including, the probation and parole regional administrator level. [S. 943.10\(3\), F.S.](#)

¹² [S. 111.09\(1\)\(b\), F.S.](#) The definition also includes a volunteer law enforcement officer, firefighter, emergency medical technician, or paramedic engaged by the state or a local government. [S. 112.1815\(1\), F.S.](#)

¹³ [S. 111.09\(1\)\(c\), F.S.](#)

[Peer Support Communications](#)

A “peer support communication” means an electronic, oral, or written communication, made with a mutual expectation of confidentiality while an FRP is providing peer support in his or her official capacity.¹⁴ An FRP is prohibited from divulging information or testifying in a civil, criminal, administrative, or disciplinary proceeding about a peer support communication made by a first responder while receiving peer support unless:

- The FRP is a defendant in a civil, criminal, administrative, or disciplinary proceeding arising from a complaint filed by the first responder who was a party to the peer support communication, in which case such information may be divulged but is limited to the scope of the proceeding;
- The first responder who was a party to the peer support communication agrees, in writing, to allow the FRP to testify about or divulge information related to the peer support communications;
- Based on the peer support communications, the FRP suspects that the first responder who was a party to the peer support communications has committed a criminal act or intends to commit a criminal act; or
- There are articulable facts or circumstances that would lead a reasonable, prudent person to fear for the safety of the first responder who was a party to the peer support communication, another person, or society, and the FRP communicates the information only to a potential victim and law enforcement or other appropriate authorities.¹⁵

[Section 111.09, F.S.](#), does not limit the disclosure, discovery, or admissibility of information, testimony, or evidence that is obtained by an FRP from a source other than a first responder through a peer support communication.¹⁶

RECENT LEGISLATION:

YEAR	BILL #	HOUSE SPONSOR(S)	SENATE SPONSOR	OTHER INFORMATION
2024	<u>CS/HB 1415</u>	Chamberlin	Collins	Became law on October 1, 2024.

OTHER RESOURCES:

[First Responder Suicide Deterrence Task Force – 2023 Annual Report](#)

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
<u>Criminal Justice Subcommittee</u>	16 Y, 0 N, As CS	3/6/2025	Hall	Padgett
THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited the support personnel who are eligible for peer support to such support personnel who are involved in investigating a crime scene or collecting or processing evidence.			
<u>Judiciary Committee</u>				

THIS BILL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN UPDATED TO INCORPORATE ALL OF THE CHANGES DESCRIBED ABOVE.

¹⁴ [S. 111.09\(1\)\(e\), F.S.](#)

¹⁵ [S. 111.09\(2\), F.S.](#)

¹⁶ [S. 111.09\(3\), F.S.](#)

