

CHAPTER 134

AN ACT concerning first responders and supplementing chapter 15 of Title 34 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.34:15-31.15 Definitions.

1. As used in this act:

“Critical incident” means an event involving the firing of a weapon or an exchange of gun fire; serious bodily injury to or the death of a minor; a terrorist act; a hostage situation; serious bodily injury to or the death of another first responder employed in the same agency or unit, when that serious bodily injury or death occurred in the performance of that first responder’s official duties; a personal injury or wound; serious bodily injury received in the performance of the first responder’s official duties; the visual or audible witnessing of the death or maiming, or the visual or audible witnessing of the immediate aftermath of the death or maiming, of one or more persons; the response to or direct involvement in a criminal investigation of an offense involving violent crimes against minors; the need for rescue in the line of duty where one’s life was in danger; or the response to or direct involvement in an investigation regarding the drowning or near drowning of a minor.

“First responder” means a paid 9-1-1 first responder dispatcher, law enforcement officer, paid firefighter, or paid member of a duly incorporated first aid, emergency, ambulance, or rescue squad association or any other individual who, in the course of that individual’s employment, is dispatched to the scene of an emergency situation for the purpose of providing medical care or other assistance.

“Law enforcement officer” means a person who is employed as a sworn member of any State, county, or municipal law enforcement agency, department, division, or instrumentality of those governments who is statutorily empowered to act for the detection, investigation, arrest, conviction, detention, or rehabilitation of persons violating the criminal laws of the State.

“Mental health professional” means a licensed mental health professional who holds a current, valid license issued pursuant to subsection a. of section 6 or subsection a. or d. of section 8 of P.L.1991, c.134 (C.45:15BB-1 et seq.), who is culturally competent in mental health issues related to first responders, and specializes in treating first responders related to critical incidents in law enforcement and firefighting.

“Minor” means a person under the age of 18 years.

"Paid firefighter" or "firefighter" means a full-time paid firefighter employed by a public fire department.

“Peer support team” means law enforcement officers trained by culturally competent mental health professionals to provide emotional and practical assistance to first responders.

"Public fire department" or "department" means any department of a municipality, county, fire district or the State or any agency thereof having employees engaged in firefighting provided that such firefighting employees are included in a negotiating unit exclusively comprised of firefighting employees.

“Resiliency program officer” means a designated law enforcement officer who is responsible for the training and implementation of the New Jersey Resiliency Program for Law Enforcement (NJRP-LE) within the officer’s employing agency, pursuant to Attorney General Directive No. 2019-1.

C.34:15-31.16 Employer of first responders, 12 hours of paid confidential counseling.

2. a. An employer of first responders shall provide for up to 12 hours of paid confidential counseling compensable under the provisions of R.S.34:15-1 et seq. with a mental health professional to a first responder who experiences a critical incident in the course of the first responder's employment related to the first responder's experience of the critical incident. The counseling is in addition to, and separate from, any benefits already provided by an employer sponsored health plan or a group health insurance trust fund. The first responder shall be authorized to select the mental health professional who will conduct the counseling as provided by this subsection.

b. If a mental health professional determines that the first responder would benefit from additional hours of licensed counseling beyond the initial 12 hours and that the additional hours of licensed counseling are likely to improve the first responder's condition, the employer of the first responder shall pay for up to an additional 24 hours of licensed counseling.

c. All hours of licensed counseling authorized under this section are required to be completed within one year after the first responder's first visit to a mental health professional.

d. The employer of the first responder shall not require the use of accrued annual or vacation leave, personal leave, sick leave, or any other paid leave if a counseling session scheduled pursuant to this section occurs during the first responder's established work hours.

C.34:15-31.17 Interactions between law enforcement officer and resiliency program officer, confidential.

3. Interactions related to mental health support between a law enforcement officer and a resiliency program officer or a member of a peer support team shall be confidential. A resiliency program officer or a member of a peer support team shall not be required to disclose mental health support related communications with another law enforcement officer, except if the law enforcement officer is reasonably believed to be a risk to themselves or others or when there is evidence of the commission of a crime by the law enforcement officer.

4. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved August 21, 2025.