

Unions and Community Rally Around Correctional Officer Blake Schwarz Suicide Prevention Act of 2024

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The American Federation of

Government Employees (AFGE) Local 4070 today praised Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (IA-01) for introducing H.R. 9929, the Correctional Officer Blake Schwarz Suicide Prevention Act of 2024. This critical legislation would expand access to mental health services for

Bureau of Prisons (BOP) law enforcement officers in an effort to prevent future tragedies.



We cannot wait for more officers to die by suicide to care about this issue. The Time is now to prioritize Correctional Officer's mental health."

JON ZUMKEHR

Officer Schwarz was more than just a statistic. He was a top honor graduate from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center Academy and "Federal correctional officers work in some of the most dangerous and violent environments imaginable, putting them at increased risk for depression, PTSD, and suicide compared to other professions," said AFGE National [President Everett Kelley](#).

"Many of our BOP members are military veterans, who have experienced staggering rates of PTSD and depression in recent years. We extend our deepest condolences to the family of Officer Blake Schwarz, whose memory this bill honors by working to prevent similar tragedies."

H.R. 9929 offers a comprehensive solution to the mental health crisis among correctional officers by:

- Expanding access to mental health services and suicide prevention programs
- Integrating these services with existing workplace health insurance to ensure confidential access
- Implementing routine mental health screenings to identify at-risk officers early
- Fostering a culture that normalizes seeking help and combats the stigma associated with mental health care

The statistics are alarming: correctional officers experience PTSD, depression, and suicide at rates significantly higher than the general population. The stressful and often traumatic nature of their work contributes to these elevated rates. It is our responsibility to provide the support and resources

necessary to mitigate these risks and ensure officers can perform their duties without sacrificing their mental health.

"I pray that not one more officer feels there is no way out," said Michelle Schwarz, widow of Officer Blake Schwarz. "To all officers, please utilize these resources. Your job is like no other. To everyone who made this possible, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I can't wait to show his little girl that her daddy is still making a difference in others' lives."

"We must work together to help first responders receive better and stronger care in their place of work. I have heard countless stories from correctional officers and other first responders about the type of mental resiliency this job takes. We can no longer stand by and watch correctional officers protect our public, yet suffer from mental illness and suicidal ideation in silence. We MUST dismantle first responder mental health stigma. We MUST work to get first responders stronger care. We MUST work to help first responders know

it's okay not to be okay – there are resources to aid healing! Our correctional officers continue to protect our people and our country – it is now our duty protect their mental health. The time is now. We cannot wait for more people to die by suicide to care about this issue. The time is now for change and you all have the power to do so. I urge and I beg you; do not learn about suicide from suicide itself," Haley DeGreve, Founder & President of The Gray Matters Collective

Investment in the morale, retention, and effectiveness of those who keep our prisons and communities safe. The well-being of our correctional officers directly impacts prison safety and stability. We demand that Congress take immediate action and pass this bill," said Jon Zumkehr, President of AFGE Local 4070.

AFGE was joined in endorsing the legislation by Kevin F. Atwood, Co-Founder & Executive Director of Foster's Voice, Inc., Don Williams, President of Voices of JOE, Jason Anderson, National Vice President of AFGE District 7, Brian Dawe, National Director of One Voice United, Haley DeGreve, Founder & President of The Gray Matters Collective, NFP, Dan Gosa, President of the Quad City Federation of Labor, and Scot Ward, President of IL FOP Corrections 263.

"We applaud Congresswoman Miller-Meeks for her leadership in introducing H.R. 9929 and her partnership with AFGE Local 4070," said AFGE Local 4070 President Jon Zumkehr. "We urge all members of Congress to cosponsor this bill and work towards its swift passage. The lives of our correctional officers depend on it."



Meeting Miller Meeks IA D 1

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