

CHAPTER 233

AN ACT concerning emergency services peer counseling and supplementing chapter 84A of Title 2A of the New Jersey Statutes.

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

C.2A:84A-22.17 Definitions relative to emergency services peer counseling.

1. a. As used in this act:

"Emergency services personnel" means a person who is employed as a law enforcement officer, emergency medical service technician, firefighter, emergency communications operator or in some related occupation or profession, or who serves as a volunteer member of a fire department, duly incorporated fire or first aid company, volunteer emergency, ambulance or rescue squad association or organization and provides emergency services for a local governmental unit.

"Emergency services provider" means a local law enforcement agency, emergency medical services unit, fire department or force, emergency communications provider, volunteer fire department, duly incorporated fire or first aid company, volunteer emergency, ambulance or rescue squad association or organization or company which provides emergency services.

"Emergency assistance program" means a program established by an emergency services provider to provide peer counseling and support services to employees and volunteers who, while providing emergency services, have been involved in incidents which may produce personal or job-related depression, anxiety, stress or other psychological or emotional tensions, traumas, pressures or disorders. Such incidents may include, but not be limited to: an event involving the firing of a weapon; significant or serious bodily injury; death; a terroristic act; a hostage situation; or personal injury.

"Peer counselor" means a member of a law enforcement agency, emergency medical service unit, fire department or force, emergency communications provider, volunteer fire department, duly incorporated fire or first aid company, volunteer emergency, ambulance or rescue squad association or organization, an authorized representative of a collective bargaining unit or organization representing law enforcement officers or firefighters, or any private citizen designated by an emergency services provider to provide post traumatic counseling and support services for emergency services personnel.

b. Except as otherwise provided in subsection c. of this act:

(1) All information exchanged between a peer counselor and any emergency services personnel participating in an emergency assistance program shall be deemed confidential and shall not be disclosed to any other person; and

(2) A peer counselor shall be privileged against examination as a witness in any civil or criminal proceeding, or in any administrative or arbitration proceeding, with regard to the exchange of information that occurred in an emergency assistance program.

c. Nothing in this act shall be deemed to prohibit:

(1) A professional exchange of information between peer counselors, counseling supervisors and appropriately licensed or certified psychologists, social workers or mental health professionals designated by, or contracted by, the emergency services provider for the exclusive purpose of providing for the care and treatment of any emergency services personnel who have been involved in incidents which produced personal or job-related depression, anxiety, stress or other psychological or emotional tensions, traumas, pressures or disorders;

(2) An exchange of information concerning any threat or suggestion of suicide or

physical harm;

- (3) An exchange of information relating to child abuse or elder abuse; or
- (4) An exchange of information relating to the commission of a crime.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 17, 2014.