

Dear Representative Koznick and members of the House,

My name is Chris Steward and I am writing to you regarding the bill put forth for Sally Mixon and Abijah's on the Backside. I am a retired Minneapolis Police Sergeant and after 14+ years as a police officer, I was diagnosed with PTSD in the June of 2020 following the weeks of riots which took place in Minneapolis. During my time with Minneapolis, I spent the majority of my time in North Minneapolis's 4<sup>th</sup> precinct. I also spent time in our plain clothes ATF Weapons Investigations Unit, our FBI Safe Streets Unit, and 2 years on our SWAT team.

During my time with Minneapolis, I responded to thousands of calls for service, interacted with hundreds of thousands of individuals and on a daily basis dealt with calls and situations that most people's nightmares are made of. I have seen the worst of mankind in what I can only describe as pure evil. I have seen hundreds of dead bodies that have ranged from the result of gang shootings, to fatal car accidents, to suicides, to the worst of them all, the death of children at the hands of their parents.

I have delt with bloodied females who have been assaulted as a result of domestic assault, abandoned and malnourished children, and victims of sex trafficking and rape to name a few. I have been shot at and physically assaulted not because of who I am as a person but the uniform that I wore and what it represented. After years and years of seeing these horrific and God awful things, soon or later they catch up to you mentally. Unfortunately they did for me in June of 2020 when I was diagnosed with PTSD.

Leaving a profession that I loved in a way I never imagined was the most difficult thing I have done in my life. My department failed to acknowledge PSTD before this and they failed to set up any meaningful programs, peer support, or any other means of coping with the traumatic events that we as first responders deal with every day. When I left the department, I felt as though I had been isolated, abandoned, demonized and alone. That is why I created Heroes Helping Heroes.

Heroes Helping Heroes is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides non-medical support to assist law enforcement officers, fire personnel and EMS personnel (collectively, "First Responders") cope with mental health conditions caused by their employment, specifically Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Through various events, Heroes Helping Heroes provides First Responders suffering from PTSD and other work-related mental health issues an opportunity to

network, relax, and socialize with others facing similar hardships. Heroes Helping Heroes hosts events at little or no cost to its members.

As a result of creating this organization I have met hundreds of wonderful and amazing people who have either experienced many of the same things I have in my career or in this situation, Sally and Abijah's on the Backside who want to help people like me who have suffer from PTSD and the traumatic things I have seen and dealt with throughout my career.

When I met Sally, she blew me away with her passion for helping our military and our law enforcement professionals. As a daughter of a military veteran and a sister who has two police officer brothers, I knew her passion for helping our heroes match that of mine.

After discussing both of our organizations and what we do and hope to accomplish, Abijah's on the Backside and Heroes Helping Heroes has begun to partner up so we can help our brave men and women who have sacrificed so much for their communities. As a trained and licensed therapist, Sally has offered to help our organization as well as myself.

Although I have been receiving traditional therapy for the last 2+ years I wanted to see if something could help me ever more. So, when Abijah's offered me the opportunity to try equine therapy, I jump on it. I was not quite sure what to expect at first even though Sally told me all about it, after my first session I was sold.

Stepping into an area with these massive thoroughbred race horses in which you are not able to run away from nor confront them left me in a very vulnerable position. A position where I could truly open up and allow the healing process to begin. One can omit things or show a strong front to fool people, but there is no omitting or fooling these horses. I am unable to describe how, but these horses immediately pick up on how you are feeling and if something is bothering you.

Spending time with these beautiful animals, and the insight from Sally and what she sees, has brought up a prospective and a different way of looking at things then I previously have. It has already helped me in the healing process and made a difference in my personal life. I am a true believer.

I cannot speak highly enough of Abijah's on the Backside and just as important when running a credited organization is their leader, Sally Mixon. Not only is she extremely passionate in helping our police and military but just as important, she is trusted by a segment of the population who trust very few. Having this trust, this inviting and friendly person who has the experience and that you immediately know you can open up to allows one to start healing those wounds, this trauma that run so deep in our police and military communities.

As I conclude with this, I humbly ask you to consider AND approve the bill set forth to provide funding for Abijah's on the Backside.

Sincerely:

Chris Steward