



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
John W. Mannion

Enhanced mental health support for Onondaga law enforcement thanks to state funding

SENATOR JOHN W. MANNION January 9, 2024

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Responding to violent scenes and unfolding tragedies defines the work police do each day. Law enforcement members in Onondaga County will soon have access to more mental health services, thanks to \$100,000 in state funding.

Sen. John Mannion secured the money in last year's state budget, allowing the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office to make what's currently a part-time mental health professional's position full-time.

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"It takes a trained professional sometimes to provide a simple, logical, and sometimes ... obvious but professional intervention that can have a tremendous impact," Mannion said.

Sheriff Toby Shelley says there are moments in his career that he can't forget. Like one day years ago when he says he could've used someone to talk through what he saw.

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"I remember four days off probation," said Shelley, "there was a two-and-a-half-year-old boy on a tricycle. His mother went to get to the phone, he stood up on his tricycle to reach inside the car ... he was riding his tricycle in the garage. He fell into the car - just his head got caught in the window, and he hung himself."

He waited for medical help to get there. He says he stood there, processing what had just happened, thinking about his son who was around the same age as the boy at the time. Sheriff Shelley remembers his boss arriving at the scene, my sergeant said to me "'How about acting like a cop and do something. How do you know that the mother didn't do that?' And in our time, that's how we were treated. Nobody really cared how you felt about something."

Now as sheriff, he's looking at starting a full-time officer wellness program position.

Cops will not show weakness, but we have weak spots. Weak spots in our hearts, so we need to help those weak spots in those people's hearts.

Cicero Police Chief Steve Rotunno says this kind of program can help men and women in uniform who see the unthinkable during a shift, and then have to go home to their own families, "We care about the deputies, we care about the police officers, we care about the troopers. We're in this together and this is just another tool that the sheriff and the senator brought to the table for us to use."

This law enforcement wellness program is modeled after what's been done at the Monroe County Sheriff's Office in Rochester, New York. Although the money has not yet made it to county coffers, it's been earmarked in the state budget according to Mannion.

View the article [here](#).