

PEER SUPPORT MEMBER POLICY

Non-ALEA Peer Support Member Certification

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish the procedure by which the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency ("ALEA") will certify individuals who qualify as Peer Support Members ("PSM") and regulate and govern the certification of emergency personnel and chaplains affiliated with other State agencies, as well as with ALEA, in compliance with Alabama Act 2021-346 ("the Act"). Because only ALEA and the Alabama Fire College are authorized to certify an individual as a peer support member under the Act, this policy and certification process seeks to efficiently certify peer support members in Alabama. The following policy will govern ALEA's internal PSM program as well as the certification of emergency personnel and chaplains affiliated with other agencies outside of ALEA and across Alabama.

What is Peer Support?

Peer support members provide emotional and moral support to emergency responders and their spouses when needed as a result of job-related stress or an incident in which the emergency responder was involved while acting in his/her official capacity. The goal of peer support is to promote and help maintain the well-being of emergency responders and their families.

I. Duties of a Peer Support Member

A PSM is deemed ready to serve when he/she receives a PSM certificate. PSM's will mainly be called to serve in the county where they reside. A PSM may be called to the scene of an incident at any time and must be available on a 24-hour basis. His/her duty is to offer moral and emotional support to emergency responders in need. The PSM shall maintain and respect the confidentiality of those who seek his/her guidance. Additionally, a PSM will keep no written record of conversations. He/she shall neither give nor receive any favor, gift, or gratuity that has, or has the appearance of having, a basis in special consideration. PSM's shall not lend their position to any political or social movement in any manner that may suggest Agency endorsement of such a movement. PSM's duties include but are not limited to:

- a. Listening to emergency responders
- b. Offering helpful suggestions when appropriate
- c. Letting emergency responders know about resources available to them and their families
- d. Offering stress management tips
- e. Offering moral and emotional support to an emergency responder at the scene of an incident, during a burial ceremony, in a hospital setting, etc.
- f. Assisting in crisis situations, such as homicide, suicide, or civil disturbances when requested by the officer in charge
- g. Attending agency-approved training sessions

II. Certification

According to the Act, non-ALEA peer support applicants must meet the following criteria to become a certified peer support member:

- a. "The person must be an emergency responder or a chaplain of an emergency service agency."

The Act defines a certified peer support member as "[a]n emergency responder or a person who is assigned to be a chaplain by an emergency service agency, who is certified as a peer support member by the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency, or the Alabama Fire College to provide emotional or moral support to an emergency responder who needs emotional or moral support as a result of job-related stress or an incident in which the emergency responder was involved while acting in his or her official capacity."

The Act defines an emergency responder as "[a] law enforcement officer, firefighter, wildland firefighter, paramedic, emergency dispatcher, or emergency medical technician of an emergency service agency or entity."

- b. "The person must complete training in critical stress management or peer support by a recognized training agency. Recognized training agencies include the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF), the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), the American Red Cross (ARC), and the Regional Counterdrug Training Academy (RCTA)."

ALEA has designated the following as certification courses to ensure that potential PSM's receive proper critical stress management and peer support training. An individual applying for PSM certification *must* take one of the following certification courses to qualify; an applicant who chooses to take any of the ARC training courses listed below must take an additional non-ARC training course listed below to qualify for PSM certification:

1. Assisting individuals in crisis & group crisis intervention (ICISF)
2. Complete officer survival seminar (RCTA)
3. Introduction to victim advocacy training (NOVA)
4. NOVA victim assistance academy (NOVA)
5. Pastoral crisis intervention (ICISF)
6. Peer support training (RCTA)
7. CPR Training (ARC)

If taken as a certification course, individual must complete a second certification course listed in this section that is not offered by the ARC to satisfy ALEA certification standards.

8. First Aid Training (ARC)

If taken as a certification course, individual must complete a second certification course listed in this section that is not offered by the ARC to satisfy ALEA certification standards.

- c. “The person must be designated in writing by a sheriff, police chief, fire chief, or other head of a law enforcement agency, fire department, rescue agency, or a public safety agency to provide peer support services to an emergency responder or the spouse of an emergency responder. Only one certified peer support person may be assigned per any specific peer support event.”

The Act defines a peer support event as “any debriefing, defusing, or coaching session conducted by a certified peer support member in which emotional or moral support is given to an emergency responder in need of emotional or moral support due to job-related stress or an incident in which the emergency responder was involved while acting in his or her official capacity.”

- d. “Law enforcement officers, emergency dispatchers, or persons assigned to be a chaplain by an emergency service agency, must be certified by the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency. Firefighters, wildland firefighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians for an emergency service or entity, or persons assigned to be a chaplain by an emergency service agency, must be certified by the Alabama Fire College.”

ALEA's certification process includes an application which can be found at www.alea.gov.

ALEA reserves the right to deny certification to any individual who fails to meet the above-listed standards. If certified as a PSM by ALEA, the individual will receive an e-mail notification and a signed certificate as proof of his/her certification. The signed certificate will be mailed to the address the applicant provided on his/her application.

III. Background Check

As one of only two certifying entities, ALEA requires that all non-ALEA applicants for PSM certification request a State background check through ALEA as part of the application process. The background check application can be found at [SBI-ApplicationReviewALCHRI.pdf \(alea.gov\)](#).

State background checks through ALEA are done at no cost for PSM applicants.

IV. Re-certification

Although the Act does not require it, ALEA requires certified PSM's to re-certify every 36 months to ensure that PSM's remain qualified to perform their duties. Each PSM who wishes to re-certify as a PSM after his/her certificate expires must complete the re-certification process, which includes completing the re-certification application, requesting a new background check through ALEA, and submitting proof that he/she has completed a re-certification course (the list of re-certification courses is below in the “re-certification training” section). The re-certification course must be completed before submission of the re-certification form. The applicant should complete and submit the re-certification documentation to ALEA within 30 days after the individual's PSM certificate expires.

The re-certification application can be found at www.alea.gov.

V. Re-Certification Training

ALEA requires all peer support members to attend at least one agency-approved training every 36 months to qualify for re-certification. The courses listed below have been designated by ALEA as sufficient re-

certification trainings. PSM's may take any of the following re-certification trainings to qualify for re-certification by ALEA:

- a. Advanced assisting individuals in crisis (ICISF)
- b. AED training (ARC)
- c. CPR training (ARC)
- d. Critical incident stress debriefing (ICISF)
- e. First aid training (ARC)
- f. NOVA annual training event (NOVA)
- g. NOVA campus advocacy training (NOVA)
- h. Officer-involved training (RCTA)
- i. Officer survival tactics (RCTA)
- j. Sex trafficking advanced victim assistance training (NOVA)
- k. Skills session (ARC)
- l. Strategic response to crisis (ICISF)
- m. Suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention (ICISF)
- n. Total officer survival (RCTA)

ALEA reserves the right to deny an individual re-certification if he/she fails to meet the above standards.

VI. Privileged Communication

As stated in the Act, "any communication made by an emergency responder to a certified peer support member during a peer support event is privileged" unless otherwise stated in the section below. While the emergency responder may waive this privilege, the certified peer support member may not be compelled to testify or otherwise disclose the contents of any privileged communication with the emergency responder.

VII. Communication Not Privileged

As stated in the Act, "communication made by an emergency responder to a certified peer support member is *not* privileged" if any of the following apply:

- a. "The PSM was an initial emergency service responder, a witness, or a party to the incident or event that prompted the communication to the certified peer support member."
- b. "The communication reveals the intended commission of a crime or otherwise harmful act, and the disclosure of the communication is determined to be necessary by the certified peer support member to protect any person from a clear and imminent risk of mental or physical harm or to forestall a serious threat to public safety."
- c. "The communication reveals that a crime was committed."
- d. "A court determines the communications are not privileged under the exceptions provided in Rule 503(d), Alabama Rules of Evidence."

VIII. Agency Peer Support Coordinator

ALEA has appointed a Peer Support Coordinator to oversee the peer support program. The Agency coordinator's duties include but are not limited to:

- a. Assisting with the PSM recruitment and application review process
- b. Coordinating the replacement and transfer of chaplains
- c. Tracking who has applied and who has been certified as a PSM
- d. Notifying PSM's of changes in command or changes to the PSM policy when applicable

All PSM's will notify the agency Peer Support Coordinator when they respond to a peer support event. ALEA's Peer Support Coordinator may be reached via email at first.last@alea.gov.

ALEA Peer Support Member Certification

I. What is Peer Support?

Peer support members ("PSM") provide emotional and moral support to emergency responders and their spouses when needed as a result of job-related stress or an incident in which the emergency responder was involved while acting in his/her official capacity. The goal of peer support is to promote and help maintain the well-being of emergency responders and their families.

II. Duties of a Peer Support Member

A PSM is deemed ready to serve when he/she receives a PSM certificate. PSM's will mainly be called to serve in the county where they reside. A PSM may be called to the scene of an incident at any time and must be available on a 24-hour basis. A PSM's duty is to offer moral and emotional support to the emergency responders in need. The PSM shall maintain and respect the confidentiality of those who seek his/her guidance. Additionally, PSM's shall keep no written record of conversations. He/she shall neither give nor receive any favor, gift, or gratuity that has, or appears to have, a basis in special consideration. PSM's shall not lend their position to any political or social movement in any manner that may suggest Agency endorsement of such a movement. PSM's duties include but are not limited to:

- a. Listening to the emergency responders
- b. Offering helpful suggestions when appropriate
- c. Alerting emergency responders about resources available to them and their families
- d. Offering stress management tips
- e. Offering moral and emotional support to an emergency responder at the scene of an incident, during a burial ceremony, in a hospital setting, etc.
- f. Assisting in crisis situations, such as homicide, suicide, or civil disturbances when requested by the officer in charge
- g. Attending agency-approved training sessions

III. PSM Certification

According to the Act, an ALEA employee must meet the following criteria before becoming a certified peer support member:

- a. "The person must be an emergency responder or a chaplain of an emergency service agency."

The Act defines a certified peer support member as "[a]n emergency responder or a chaplain of an emergency service agency who is certified as a peer support member by the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency, or the Alabama Fire College to provide emotional or moral support to an emergency responder who needs emotional or moral support as a result of job-related stress or an incident in which the emergency responder was involved while acting in his or her official capacity."

The Act defines an emergency responder as “[a] law enforcement officer, firefighter, wildland firefighter, paramedic, emergency dispatcher, or emergency medical technician of an emergency service agency or entity.”

- b. “The person must complete training in critical stress management or peer support by a recognized training agency. Recognized training agencies include the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF), the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), the American Red Cross (ARC), and the Regional Counterdrug Training Academy (RCTA).”

ALEA has designated the following as certification courses to ensure that PSM's receive proper critical stress management and peer support training. An individual applying for PSM certification *must* take one of the following certification courses to qualify; an applicant who chooses to take any of the ARC training courses listed below must take an additional non-ARC training course listed below to qualify for PSM certification:

1. Assisting individuals in crisis & group crisis intervention (ICISF)
2. Complete officer survival seminar (RCTA)
3. Introduction to victim advocacy training (NOVA)
4. NOVA victim assistance academy (NOVA)
5. Pastoral crisis intervention (ICISF)
6. Peer support training (RCTA)
7. CPR Training (ARC)

If taken as a certification course, individual must complete a second certification course listed in this section that is not offered by the ARC to satisfy ALEA certification standards.

8. First Aid Training (ARC)

If taken as a certification course, individual must complete a second certification course listed in this section that is not offered by the ARC to satisfy ALEA certification standards.

- c. “Law enforcement officers, emergency dispatchers, or persons assigned to be a chaplain by an emergency service agency, must be certified by the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency. Firefighters, wildland firefighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians for an emergency service or entity, or persons assigned to be a chaplain by an emergency service agency, must be certified by the Alabama Fire College.”

ALEA's certification process includes an application which can be found at www.alea.gov. At ALEA's discretion, ALEA employees do not need a letter of designation but instead must write a one-page essay, which is described in the PSM application.

According to the Act, only one certified peer support person may be assigned per any specific peer support event, which is defined as “any debriefing, defusing, or coaching session conducted by a certified peer support member in which emotional or moral support is given to an emergency responder in need of emotional or moral support due to job-related stress or an incident in which the emergency responder was involved while acting in his or her official capacity.”

ALEA reserves the right to deny certification to any individual who fails to meet the above standards. If certified as a PSM by ALEA, the individual will receive an e-mail notification and a signed certificate as proof of his/her certification. The signed certificate will be mailed to the address the applicant provided on his/her application.

IV. Chaplain Certification

As required by ALEA, to become a certified ALEA Chaplain, the applicant must meet *all* the above certification standards and all the following must apply:

- a. Must be ordained by a recognized place of worship
- b. Must possess a valid Alabama ID
- c. Must have served in the ministry at least 3 years
- d. Must be available on a 24-hour basis
- e. Cannot have any criminal convictions (excludes minor traffic violations)
- f. Must be familiar with community resources available to Agency personnel and their families
- g. Must attend Agency-approved training
- h. Must be certified by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency

Within ALEA, chaplains are appointed members who serve voluntarily and do not possess law enforcement powers.

Chaplain applicants must complete the chaplain application, which can be accessed at www.alea.gov. Chaplain applicants must submit a copy of his/her letter of ordination with his/her application.

The ALEA Secretary reserves the right to deny certification to any individual who fails to meet the above standards. If certified as a Chaplain by ALEA, the individual will receive an e-mail notification and a signed certificate as proof of his/her certification. The signed certificate will be mailed to the address the applicant provided on his/her application.

V. Re-certification

Although not required by the Act, ALEA requires its certified PSM's to re-certify as a peer support member every 36 months to ensure they remain qualified to perform the duties. Each PSM who wishes to continue as a PSM after his/her certificate expires must complete the re-certification process. The PSM certificate is only valid for 36 months from the date of certification. ALEA's re-certification process requires the current PSM to fill out a form requesting re-certification and to submit proof that he/she completed a re-certification course (the list of re-certification courses is below in the "re-certification training" section), which must be completed before submission of the re-certification form. An applicant must complete the re-certification process within 30 days after his/her PSM certificate expires.

The re-certification application can be found at www.alea.gov.

VI. Re-Certification Training

ALEA requires all peer support members to attend at least one Agency-approved training every 36 months to qualify for re-certification by ALEA. The courses listed below have been designated by ALEA as sufficient

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- b. AED training (ARC)
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