

**TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL**

**FROM: Brice Miller, FIRE CHIEF**

**SUBJECT: Checkup from the neck up**

**DATE: February 10, 2026**

**BACKGROUND**

Each call for service has the potential to be traumatic and life altering for our firefighters, police officers and ambulance paramedics and EMTs. They knew that becoming an emergency responder, but there are steps that public safety agencies can take to minimize the impact on not only their employees, but on the family of those employees. We have utilized Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) for years following what could be a traumatic call, however that alone does not relieve the impact of seeing things that most people only see in nightmares on a regular basis. Public Safety has been learning more about the cumulative impact those events have on emergency responders and, by extension, their families.

The Chiefs of the Fire, Police and EMS have been talking about moving from the voluntary program of CISM to a required program for our employees. This seems to be the direction that the Public Safety industry is heading and for several good reasons.

- Improves the mental health of employees. Each employee may or may not be impacted by a single event, but the potential for impacting mental health from repeated exposure to both the routine and traumatic calls has become clear to Public Safety.
- Implementing a mandated program removes any stigma an employee may feel. While CISM is a good program, it is voluntary and not all take advantage of it.
- Regular checkups help identify and address mental health concerns early, preventing more severe problems, like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Checkups provide not only an opportunity to talk with a trained professional, but tools and strategies to manage stress and trauma effectively.
- Check-ups foster relationships between public safety personnel and mental health professionals, ensuring employees know where to turn for support when needed.
- Regular mental wellness check-ins can reduce the risk of burnout, which is critical for our City, which utilizes a large number of volunteers for Fire and Ambulance.
- By addressing mental health proactively, agencies can improve overall employee well-being and job performance while reducing the chance of burnout and suicidal thoughts among public safety workers.

These reasons have led us to seek approval to implement what is commonly referred to as a “Checkup from the neck up” (Checkup). We see implementing a Checkup program as

the right direction for all the reasons noted above. The Chiefs have been researching what other departments around us are doing and while there are some ranges within the one constant that has been learned is for agencies that have implemented a Checkup program they see benefits in the mental wellbeing of their employees. To better understand what a Checkup is, let's start with what it is not. It is not a therapy session. It is not to evaluate or diagnose an employee.

So, what is a Checkup. It is a mandatory 40–50-minute session with a mental health professional. The session is a dialog between the employee and the Mental Health Professional who understands the challenges Public Safety workers face. It provides tools to manage their stress and trauma response. Helps identify resources and support networks that can be utilized by the employee. The conversation will likely cover these aspects:

- Confidentiality of the Checkup and any follow-up an employee chooses to do.
- Physical factors: health, exercise, nutrition and sleep.
- Mental factors: mindset, work-life balance and coping strategies
- Social factors: support structures (family, friends, work/coworkers) and group activities.
- How stress accumulation can impact a person's health, mood and cognitive function.
- Benefits of receiving professional mental health counseling and therapy and how it works.

The conversation direction is up to the employee. The mental health professional will ensure that the employee learns about the resources and starts building a relationship so that the employee knows is there 24/7, whether they need it or not.

In discussing the positives of implementing a Checkup program the question of the impacts on Public Safety worker's family was raised. The Chiefs agree that in addition to providing a Checkup program for our employees, we feel offering bi-annual events for spouses or significant others is important. The primary support system for our employees is likely their spouse/significant other and family, so providing support to them seems critical to supporting the employee. For the bi-annual Checkup we envision offering one presented by a mental health professional covering the dynamics of being a public safety worker's family and the resources available. The other session focuses on benefits of nutrition and exercise and resources for them.

We have discussed the implementation of a Checkup program with the City Administrator who understands the importance of mental health awareness for emergency service employees. We are at a point where getting direction from the City Council will help us structure the request for services proposal we put out to potential vendors. As we looked at a direction, we see two primary ways to implement our Checkup program.

#### Option 1

- Annual mandated Checkup meeting for each public safety employee.
- Provide employees with the ability to have additional meetings paid for by the City. Many of the Cities researched were offering between 10-12 a year.
- Conduct bi-annual programs for spouse/significant other.

#### Option 2

- Bi-annual mandated Checkup meeting for each public safety employee
- Provide employees with the ability to have a number of additional meetings paid for by the City. Many of the Cities researched were offering between 10-12 a year.
- Conduct bi-annual programs for spouse/significant other.

The Chief's recommendation is to implement option 2. We feel that while option 2 will have some additional costs, it provides an additional mandated checkup that we feel will provide greater long-term payoff in the wellbeing of our employees.

We are asking for direction from the City Council for two reasons. First and foremost, employees understand that their mental wellbeing is something the City Council cares about and is taking steps to address. Secondly that the Chiefs have the support of the City Council to implement a mandated Checkup program that some employees may feel is a waste of their time. As Chiefs we would not be bringing this forward if we did not feel it would be a benefit to the employees, Departments and the City.

We are seeking the City Council direction on which option and the number of additional visits that should be provided per year by the city. That will help us in preparing a scope of services proposal to provide to potential vendors for the next step in this process.

#### **REQUESTED COUNCIL ACTION**

Direction from the City Council on which option and the number of additional visits that should be provided per year by the city.