

Firefighters for Plant Medicine (FFPM)

Proposed adoption concerning the New Mexico Medical Psilocybin Program:

My name is Paul Walton and I represent Firefighters for Plant Medicine (FFPM). FFPM is a non-profit organization that provides advocacy and education on firefighter and first responder mental health struggles, and on the safe use and best practices for plant medicines and psychedelic assisted healing. I want to thank everyone who made this moment happen in New Mexico history. This is a great opportunity for New Mexico to be leaders in this healing treatment and develop a psilocybin program that is guided by ethics, affordability, and best practices for safe and effective healing that endures time.

As a firefighter for Bernalillo County for almost 19 years, I witnessed and experienced firsthand the physical and emotional toll that such roles can impose on individuals. Our work often involves exposure to traumatic events that can lead to several work-related injuries, such as severe depression and PTSD. First responders have a higher rate of mental health issues and suicide rates. In fact, even with higher rates of work-related cancer, injuries, and fatalities, suicide is still the number one cause of death in first responders.

There is a mental health crisis in our first responders and the front-line medical community, yet they are often overlooked when it comes to mental health treatment and support. These work-related mental injuries often make normal, everyday life a struggle for first responders. These struggles not only affect our first responders, but impacts their families, co-workers and community. Unfortunately, first responders are often the last to seek help due to cultural stigmas surrounding mental health. We are the first to help others but the last to help ourselves. First responders are not getting the treatment they need because of stigmas, affordability, lack of access, and the resistance to treatment.

First responders are not your average mental health patient and need special considerations. Where standard talk therapy and other therapy modalities are often not enough, psilocybin assisted therapy can be the breakthrough treatment that works. There needs to be community and institutional support for this healing process to work and save the lives of our first responders. First responders are in the unique position that they have to go back to work and will be subjected to additional trauma after their treatment. Regulations and policy need to include access for first responders without adverse employment action, with lawful medical support, and with an allowance that first responders may use medical leave for additional integration time after a psilocybin treatment.

While we at Firefighters for Plant Medicine understand the difficulty of developing a program of this nature and the safety guardrails that science and government desire, we do have a couple concerns about the proposed regulations.

In order to have a safe and affective psilocybin program, safety and ethics need to be core principles in therapy treatment. As with any program with financial business gains involved, ethics can sometimes be sidestepped for profit. We hope the state will be diligent in providing an avenue for patients to make reports about safety and ethical concerns, and monitoring programs due to their potential for causing harm when patients are in a vulnerable, non-ordinary state.

New Mexico currently has a substantial shortage of medical personnel, including scheduled drug prescribers. Requiring each participant to get medical clearance via an in-person medical appointment is an undue barrier to treatment that can be safely and effectively avoided. One less restrictive solution is to only require patients who are positive for any of the medical flags (history of cardiac issues, current use of SSRIs, etc.) to be required to see a prescriber for further medical evaluation. All other patients would only need to see a licensed New Mexico provider who can diagnose for the four qualifying conditions of the psilocybin therapy program, screen for any disqualifying medical concerns, and then the NMDOH would review the patient application to check again for medical concerns before approving. I believe this would adequately catch any medical concerns that need to be evaluated and affectively eliminate some of the pressure on an already short-staffed system.

Another concern is that there is no exception to allow practicum students to train and practice with each other. We strongly believe that practicing students should not be working with patients who suffer from severe depression and PTSD. This has serious harm potential for patients, and is not worth the patient risk. Firefighters for Plant Medicine would like to strongly encourage the NMDOH to consider making an exception to the regulations or amend the bill in the upcoming legislative session to allow practicum students to train and learn with each other instead of practicing for the first time with actual qualifying patients. This change in regulation would also address the concern that the number of unique practicum patients currently required would be difficult for any trainee to obtain.

Our hope is that the NMDOH will consider addressing these treatment barriers for New Mexico's first responders and for all New Mexicans who would benefit from medical psilocybin. When our first responders are mentally healthier and happier, their families, co-workers, employers, and communities all benefit.

Warm Regards,



Paul Walton, Executive Director
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