



FLORIDA FIREFIGHTERS **SAFETY** AND **HEALTH** COLLABORATIVE

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Chaplains Now a Deployable Resource in Statewide Emergency Response Plan (SERP)

As presented in the July 18, 2023, version of the Mental Health Resource and Response Guide, fire chaplains are now a deployable resource under the Statewide Emergency Response Plan (SERP). This change came about through the work of the First Responder Mental Wellness Response Subcommittee of the Florida Joint Council of Fire and Emergency Services as a result of the mental wellness response to the 2021 Surfside condominium collapse and Hurricane Ian in 2022.

The tragedy in Surfside was a defining moment for many throughout emergency services. The chaplaincy was also impacted. Surfside showed the distinct nature of the chaplaincy and the need to provide spiritual support in times of crisis. For many, great difficulty can create a crisis of faith which challenges long held spiritual beliefs. In addition, we saw how the practice of spiritual disciplines provided peace and comfort.

We also observed the complementary role chaplains play alongside mental health professionals, peer support personnel, and K-9 peer support. Together, we provide comfort and care for the heart, soul, mind and strength of Florida firefighters.

Florida Fire Chaplains are committed to providing fire rescue personnel with spiritual and emotional support during day-to-day operations and in times of large-scale, long duration events such as those involving the Statewide Emergency Response Plan. We stand ready to deploy in times of need.

Joe LaCognata
Statewide Chaplaincy Coordinator