Dear Editor,

At times of crisis, residents of our state turn to first responders for help. Police officers and firefighters are called upon to respond to traumatic events and scenes that are unimaginable to most of us, from car crashes to violent crimes. Law enforcement officer claims of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, have risen drastically in recent years. PTSD has prompted many first responders to leave the profession, resulting in staff shortages in cities and counties across the state. The question is, how can we best help those who contribute so much to our safety and wellbeing?

We can start by supporting legislation that would implement measures aimed at prevention, treatment, and financial support for those either at risk or currently suffering from PTSD. HF 1234, authored by Representative Kaohly Vang Her, would do this. We can do this by encouraging law enforcement officers and firefighters to seek treatment for PTSD before opting to file for a permanent duty disability. Successful treatment can result in a continuation of a promising career. Additionally, HF 1234 would create and provide training options that prepare first responders for the stressful and traumatic events that are common to emergency responses and teach methods to process and cope with the stress and trauma inherent to public safety jobs.

HF 1234 would incentivize public employers to implement mental injury preventive measures. It would also require new pre-service training aimed at mental injury awareness and prevention. The bill would allow injured employees to stay on payroll for up to six months while completing treatment for a mental injury and would reimburse employers for the cost of keeping injured employees financially whole. Lastly, the bill would require treatment before the employee could become eligible for permanent duty disability benefits.

Passage of this type of HF 1234 is one step toward improving PTSD prevention and treatment options for police officers and firefighters who protect and serve their neighbors. Let us be the help they need in their time of crisis just as they have done for us time and time again. Contact your legislators and encourage them to support HF 1234.