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I have been a member of the East Hartford Fire Department for almost 25 years. I am a member of Local 1548 of the International Association of Firefighters. I am the legislative / political director as well as a union steward for Local 1548. I am here today to discuss HB6956. I am asking for your support of this legislation.

The East Hartford Fire Department responds to approximately 9000 calls per year and about 75% of those responses are EMS, (emergency medical service), calls. We provide EMS services to our community at the first responder level as well as the paramedic level. We are exposed to patients with communicable diseases, some of which can be fatal, on an almost daily basis. We always take universal precautions to avoid exposure to communicable diseases. Sometimes, unfortunately, universal precautions are not enough to avoid exposures.

An example of this would be at the scene of a motor vehicle accident where extrication of the patients is required. These types of incidents are frequently chaotic. Rescue workers do not operate in a controlled environment such as in a hospital. There are usually sharp metal edges and broken glass at these types of incidents. Sometimes there may be a lot of blood and other body fluids at these scenes. Sharp edges can easily

rip through protective gear and cut the firefighters wearing it. In this type of situation the firefighter is now at high risk of contracting blood-borne diseases.

When a firefighter is exposed to blood or other body fluids the privacy laws can make it extremely difficult for a firefighter to find out if a patient has any communicable diseases. Under the present State law a firefighter must prove that the communicable disease was contracted while at work and the burden of proof in workers' compensation cases is on the firefighter. Without being able to prove a patient has a communicable disease this is almost impossible.

Our profession is quite dangerous at times and like most firefighters I face those dangers because it helps others and it is the right thing to do. I would like to think that if I became seriously ill from an exposure on my job as a firefighter that my family and my medical bills would be taken care of. This would probably not be the case under the present State laws if I should happen to be unfortunate enough to contract hepatitis, meningococcal meningitis, or tuberculosis because I was exposed to a disease I never would have been exposed to if I were in a different line of work. I have been exposed to hepatitis, tuberculosis, as well as several other very scary diseases several times in the course of my employment. I always take universal precautions against exposure to diseases in the field and document any exposures to communicable diseases upon return to the firehouse. I have not contracted any of these diseases, but have filed under workers' compensation for several of these exposures. When I file for workers

compensation for these types of exposures the Town's workers' compensation insurance carrier usually promptly denies the claim despite the documentation of my exposures.

For a number of years I have been on my local Union's workers' compensation committee. As a member of this committee I assist other Union members with filing for workers' compensation benefits. The Town's workers' compensation carrier usually promptly denies such claims no matter how much documentation may be on file. The way the present laws are written it is almost impossible to successfully pursue a workers' compensation claim for exposure to these diseases even with proper documentation. Firefighters and police officers take many risks so that they can help others in their jobs. They shouldn't have to worry about their families and medical bills being taken care of if they become seriously ill or die from a disease contracted through their work.

Firefighters have a higher incidence of heart and hypertension disease than the general public due to the nature of their employment. In 1977 the Connecticut State Legislature recognized this fact and established a presumptive heart and hypertension law for police officers and firefighters. In 1995 this law was changed to lower workers' compensation rates for the municipalities within the state. Municipal firefighters and police officers hired after July 1, 1996 are no longer covered under this law. Other public safety personnel in this state are still receiving this benefit. Connecticut state troopers, state university police officers and firefighters, state airport police officers and firefighters, state motor vehicle inspectors, state correction officers, detectives and inspectors in the state division of criminal justice, and other state employees designated

as hazardous duty employees continue to receive these benefits. All volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance members in this state also continue to receive this benefit. We are asking for municipal career firefighters and municipal police officers hired after July 1, 1996 to receive the same on duty coverage that volunteer firefighters in this state currently receive. All firefighters face the same hazards and cope with the same stress factors and they should all receive on duty heart and hypertension benefits under workers' compensation.

Currently in this state for a career municipal firefighter hired after July 1, 1996 to receive workers' compensation benefits if they suffer a cardiac related problem at the scene of a fire, the burden of proof will be on the firefighter to prove that the problem was incurred in the course of their employment. This might not sound like it would be too hard to prove but in reality it can be extremely difficult to prove.

In the Town of East Hartford we have had several firefighters who were hospitalized with cardiac problems at the scene of structure fires who have been denied workers' compensation benefits. These firefighters were all fighting structure fires and experienced cardiac problems requiring immediate treatment in a hospital. The Town's workers' compensation carrier denied all of these claims even though all of these firefighters were involved in fighting a structure fire at the time and ordered to go to a hospital by ambulance by the supervisor in charge of the scene. In all of these cases the workers' compensation carrier claims that the firefighters did not suffer these problems in the course of their employment. All firefighters in the Town of East Hartford must

undergo a pre employment physical to rule out cardiac problems. In addition to this all Town firefighters must undergo regular physical examinations at which time their cardiac condition is checked. It is unfair for these firefighters to be subjected to this harassment by the Town's workers' compensation carrier. They went to work perfectly healthy, suffered cardiac problems while fighting a structure fire, and wound up in the hospital as a result of the fighting those fires. The Town's workers' compensation carrier refuses all claims of this nature and refuses to pay for hospitalization and follow up medical care then tells the firefighters to submit the bills to their regular insurance for payment. If a firefighter had suffered this exact same condition fighting a fire in a volunteer fire department they would have been covered. This disparity between career firefighters and volunteer firefighters needs to be corrected. Our members deserve the same coverage that the volunteers presently receive.

According to the results of a September, 2006 study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, firefighters have an increased risk of developing certain types of cancer. Firefighters are exposed to many potentially hazardous substances, including diesel engine exhaust, soot, benzene, chloroform, styrene, and formaldehyde. These substances may be inhaled or absorbed through the skin. To assess the risk of cancer among firefighters, researchers at the University of Cincinnati evaluated information from 32 previously published studies. The studies included information about more than 100,000 firefighters. Four types of cancer are more prevalent among firefighters than among workers in other occupations. When compared to other occupations, firefighters are twice as likely to develop testicular

cancer, roughly 50% more likely to develop multiple myeloma or non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and 28% more likely to develop prostate cancer.

Fire Fighters frequently enter uncontrolled environments to save lives and reduce property damage. When they enter these environments they are frequently exposed to multiple toxic and carcinogenic substances. Firefighters today are more at risk from danger of possibly contracting cancer as a result of these exposures than they are from the other dangers of the fire itself.

Currently 19 states and New York City have adopted legislation, or revised workers' compensation regulations, that presume that if a firefighter develops cancer it is as a result of their occupations as firefighters. The states are Alabama, Arizona, California, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin, as well as Connecticut's neighboring states of Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island.

HB6956 would establish a rebuttable presumption so that when fire fighters contract cancer it is presumed that the cancer is a result of their exposure to these carcinogenic substances while in the course of their work as firefighters.

Firefighters put their lives on the line everyday to protect the communities that we are sworn to protect. We are asking, through this proposed legislation, that we receive

workers' compensation coverage to protect us and our families from some of the many dangers we face everyday. I believe that it is only fair that if we contract hepatitis, meningococcal meningitis, tuberculosis, or cancer, or if we suffer a cardiac problem or die as a result of one of these conditions due to our occupations as firefighters that we be covered by workers' compensation. We put ourselves in danger every day to protect the citizens that we serve and we are asking you, through this proposed legislation, to protect our families if we die or become sick or disabled in the course of our jobs as firefighters. We need to protect our families if we become unable to provide for them or protect them ourselves due to our jobs as firefighters and the passage of HB6956 would certainly assist us in that regard.

I respectfully request that the members of this committee please support HB6956 or any similar legislation that might come before you this session. I would also ask that your colleagues in the State Legislature, should this bill make it to the floor of the full Legislature, please support this legislation. If you have any questions on this matter I'd be happy to answer them and you or your colleagues can feel free to contact me in the future on this matter. If you have further questions my home address, contact phone numbers, and email address are on my written testimony. My colleagues and I all thank you for your time today. We are asking for your support on this very important issue.