

Testimony of Richard Gudis in support of HB6956

My name is Richard Gudis, I am a former police officer and a current JAG in the US Army Reserve I am also a Staff Attorney for AFSCME Council 15 representing 4000 police officers in 60 different police departments throughout the State of Connecticut.

I am here today to testify in support of:

H.B. 6956 AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR FIREFIGHTERS AND POLICE OFFICERS.

H.B. No. 6956 would establish a rebuttable presumption for sworn police officers and municipal paid fire fighters, hired after July 1, 1996, who suffered an on duty Heart and Hypertension incident, that such injury was as a direct result of employment. Benefits would give post July 1, 1996 employees the same benefits under statute as pre July 1, 1996 employees for an on duty incident.

H.B. No. 6956 would establish a rebuttable presumption for sworn police officers and municipal paid fire fighters that certain infectious diseases contracted were as a direct result of employment and covered under the provisions of the workers' compensation statutes.

H.B. No. 6956 would also establish a rebuttable presumption and coverage for certain types of cancer for fire fighters.

We sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm." - Winston Churchill This statement sums up the job of our public safety employees, both fire and police.

Heart and Hyper tension is a consequence of operating a municipality that can neither be avoided or marginalized unless we are ready ourselves to deal with things that go bump in the night.

I was a police officer for approximately 10 years and in my experience successful police officers become police officers for one reason and one reason only and that is because there is something in them that makes them different from the rest of society. That something special that allows them to go towards the unknown call in the middle of the night rather than stay in the house and hope the police get there soon. The same can be said for Firemen and Women, it is an obvious fact that while the rest of the occupants in the building are trying to get out the firemen are trying to get in.

Chasing a suspect or running into a burning building to save someone's life triggers emotional stress which as we know leads to activation of the sympathetic nervous system, this in turn causes and increased release of norepinephrine from the sympathetic nerves in the heart and blood vessels which results in increased cardiac output and increased systemic resistance. Additionally other systems in the body kick in releasing various chemicals. Prolonged exposure to these circumstances and chemicals from the body contributes to a sustained increase in blood pressure.

These factors no one can combat against. Healthier living certainly helps deal with the rigors of being a police officer or firemen but no amount of healthy living will stop the body's automatic response to stress which will cause heart and hypertension in our Police and Firemen.

The public safety sector understands the constraints that governments are under and across the board we are starting to see individual municipalities and the unions that

represent the public sector employees coming together to make the work place safer and healthier. Recently upwards to 10 towns in Connecticut have started programs to not hire smokers, they have added gyms to their police stations and fire houses. Often time's police recertification involves a class on health and well being. The public safety sector has been proactive in attempting to eliminate some of the causes of heart and hypertension with these programs.

However, all of the non smoking programs and outright bans, wellness classes and exercise can eliminate one of the serious factors of heart and hyper tension and that is the nature of the job.

Medically it has been proven that being a police officer or firemen means a higher chance of heart and hypertension. This medical evidence was put to the test years ago and the original heart and hypertension law was enacted. Over time as medicine and research developed it was determined that the other environmental factors and life style choices had something to do with the high rates of hyper tension in the public safety sector. The response by the legislature was a predictable result of new information and the rebuttable presumption was removed and application of the law was made stricter.

Once again we bring new information to the legislature for their consideration. That information is that the life style and philosophies of people entering the public safety sector is centered on a healthy body and health living as a whole. Given this fact that the probability of a public safety person developing heart and hypertension is now primarily the cause of the job and not the result of unhealthy lifestyle choices, the legislature should return the rebuttable presumption to public safety employees suffering from heart and hypertension.

The portion of this of this bill establishing “a rebuttable presumption for sworn police officers and municipal paid fire fighters that certain infectious diseases contracted were as a direct result of employment and covered under the provisions of the workers’ compensation statutes” must pass, as a matter of public policy. Dealing with suspects is a dangerous aspect of police work, pulling someone out of a fiery car crash that is about to explode is also dangerous work. Many of the obvious dangers both scenarios impose can be mitigated through training, equipment and tactics.

Combating against an enemy that can not be seen and can be transmitted by a suspect or a victim to a Policemen or Firemen by a simple cough or sneeze is difficult if not impossible to defend against. Furthermore, the symptoms of the infectious diseases are such that knowledge of the infection is always delayed beyond the initial incident. Contracting TB is not like being shot or burned, the sickness is delayed, the final result of permanent debilitation or death is the same. Therefore, the legislature has a responsibility to insure that the employees being exposed to this danger are protected under our Workers Compensation system.

Given the positive nature of every aspect of this bill to the overall public good I would encourage that this bill be enacted.

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10 SAFETY DEPARTMENTS ARE HIRING NONSMOKERS

By SHARON L. BASS

LEAD: TO reduce insurance costs, 10 Connecticut fire and police departments are now hiring only nonsmokers. But they are allowing those already hired to continue smoking.

TO reduce insurance costs, 10 Connecticut fire and police departments are now hiring only nonsmokers. But they are allowing those already hired to continue smoking.

The hirings started about two years ago in response to Connecticut's Heart and Hypertension Act, which provides compensation to police officers and firefighters who die or become disabled from heart disease or hypertension. Applicants to the police and fire departments must sign affidavits stating that they do not smoke. Hiring only nonsmokers may divide smokers and nonsmokers at police and fire stations, according to the union officials of those departments. They further contend that requiring the affidavits threatened their civil liberties.

"Smoking may be unhealthy, but it's not illegal or immoral," said the president of the New Britain police union, William Murdock. "This brings about a two-tiered system. It divides the smokers and nonsmokers. And why are only smokers being singled out? What about obesity and alcoholism?"

The police and fire departments report no recruitment effects from their actions. Most of the new recruits in the Vernon Police Department do not smoke, said Chief Gary Kology. Three Vernon police officers are receiving disability payments under the Heart and Hypertension Act, which took effect in 1971.

The other departments hiring only nonsmokers are the Branford Fire Department, the Glastonbury Police Department, the Manchester Police Department, the Middletown Police and Fire Departments, the West Haven First District Fire Department and the Westport Fire and Police Departments.

In most cases, the officers and firefighters in these departments that do not comply with the rule face a warning and suspension for the first offense, and possibly a second warning and suspension for the second. Further noncompliance could bring dismissal.

New Britain, which has 150 police officers and firefighters each, has experienced higher insurance costs and absenteeism among its smokers, said the city's personnel director, John Byrne.

"The whole point is that we still have to pay the tab, so we need some kind of control over their lives," he said. The city screens and tests all police officers and firefighters, he said.

The Manchester Police Department is the only department to have the new regulation in its contract. The policy, which became effective two years ago, requires all police applicants who smoke to stop within one year from the date of employment.

"But," Larry Wilson, the department's public relations officer, said, "we don't have any say over what they do at home." He said he hoped that the no-smoking rule would have an affect when officers were not at the station, too.

Other city officials are working to get no-smoking clauses written into their contracts.

"As long as the new firefighter agrees to the no-smoking rules, fine," said Gary Marks, the president of the Westport Firefighters Union. "But I'm not sure about actually having it written into the contract." He said it seemed unfair that the firefighters hired before the policy took effect two years ago could "sit around the firehouse and smoke with newer men who are not allowed to."

Since last year, Glastonbury has prohibited its new police officers to smoke on or off duty. When signing their affidavit, they also must indicate that they do not plan to start smoking. About 6 of Glastonbury's 48 police officers smoke, said the department's police agent, Howard Charbonneau. Upon requests from the officers, a police cruiser has been designated for smokers only, he said.

In Vernon, three police officers have left the force on disability over the past three years under the heart and hypertension law, said Chief Kology.

Vernon, which has a self-insurance fund, is paying from \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year to those officers, said the assistant town administrator, Fred Turkington.

Chief Kology said that Vernon began a no-smoking policy last year at the suggestion of the department's surgeon. He added that he had received numerous complaints about smoke at police stations from his nonsmoking officers - less than half of the department's 47 officers are smokers, he said - and had since eliminated many of the smoking areas in the station houses.

"I hope to have happier and healthier officers," the chief said.

The departments' recruiting has not suffered from hiring only nonsmokers. "The funny thing is that almost everyone who is applying for the job is a nonsmoker anyway," said Mr. Charbonneau, the Glastonbury police agent.

Denis McCarthy, the assistant chief of the Westport Fire Department, said that hiring only nonsmokers was effective, since firefighters were exposed to many toxic materials and other chemicals during a fire. The rule, he said, "enables the department to track those become ill from toxics who smoke and those who become ill from toxics who don't smoke."



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Exercise and physical fitness: The impact on police well-being

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The Australasian Centre for Policing Research (ACPR) was established in 1983 to co-ordinate, stimulate, sponsor and undertake research on behalf of policing agencies. The centre undertakes a wide range of research and liaises closely with the National Institute of Forensic Science, the National Crime Statistics Unit, the Australian Institute of Police Management and CrimTrac.

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By Nadia Boni

The relationship between fitness and non-physical work outcomes, cognition and psychological well-being for police has been a neglected area of research.

However, evidence from other occupational groups suggests that fitness or participation in regular exercise can lead to improvements in work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. This paper examines the research evidence, including one key study that used police as participants.

The physical fitness of police officers is an area that has attracted much interest and debate in the literature. In particular, the specific fitness requirements necessary to undertake the tasks required of police officers have been examined in some detail.

The issue of overall fitness of police officers has, however, received much less attention.

In contrast, the significant health benefits for the general population associated with regular exercise are well established.

For example, the abundant health literature has demonstrated that participating in regular exercise can prevent coronary heart disease, hypertension and obesity, improve flexibility and prevent back pain and injury.

It appears that there is a strong argument for the development and maintenance of fitness among police throughout their career span, particularly since police work is characterized by stress, shift work and long periods of inactivity, coupled with a possible reliance on convenience foods.

It is clear that engaging in regular exercise has significant health benefits. It has been suggested that fitness and exercise have benefits to police that go beyond promoting physical health and preventing injury.

The general research literature does provide some support for the argument that participation in regular exercise leads to improvements in productivity, satisfaction, absenteeism, organizational commitment, cognitive processes that underlie work performance and psychological well-being.

However, this research is by no means conclusive.

Further research with police participants and evaluations of existing holistic programs are needed to clarify the extent and nature of the benefits in the policing context.

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