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I have been a member of the East Hartford Fire Department for over 26 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 asking for your support of HB6194.

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, on an almost daily basis some of these diseases can be fatal. We always take universal precautions to avoid exposure to communicable diseases. Sometimes, unfortunately, universal precautions are not enough to avoid exposure.

An example 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 successfully pursuing a workers' compensation claim 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 career. 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 and represent them at hearings. The Town's workers' compensation carrier usually promptly denies claims for exposure to communicable diseases 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. Firefighters and police officers take many risks so that they can help others. 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 in the course of their employment.

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 dangers of the fire itself.

Currently at least 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.

HB6194 would establish a rebuttable presumption so that when fire fighters contract certain types of cancer it is presumed that the cancer is a result of exposure to these carcinogenic substances 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 every day. I believe that it is only fair that if we contract hepatitis, meningococcal meningitis, tuberculosis, or certain types of cancer 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 to help 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 due to our jobs as firefighters and the passage of HB6194 would certainly assist us in that regard.

I respectfully request that the members of this committee please support HB6194 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. You or your colleagues can feel free to contact me with any questions that you might have on this matter. My home address, contact phone numbers, and email address are at the top of my testimony. My colleagues and I all thank you for moving this legislation forward and we are asking for your future support of this legislation.