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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 SB1010.

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. If we are unable to determine if a patient has a communicable disease it becomes very hard to determine if we should seek medical treatment for the exposure. It also makes it almost impossible to pursue a workers' compensation claim.

SB1010 would make it easier to determine if there was a genuine exposure to certain types of communicable diseases. If there is an exposure then the proper medical treatment can be obtained. Without knowing what you have been exposed it can become rather difficult to determine the proper course of treatment. Several years ago I received a significant exposure at the scene of motor vehicle accident. The patient I was working on passed away from his injuries and the hospital that treated him was unable to tell me if that patient had any communicable diseases that I should be aware of. My doctor asked for me to be tested for HIV and other diseases. He also wanted me to start treatment for HIV. Treatment for HIV has many negative effects on a healthy person's body so I took my chances and declined the treatment. I never contracted any disease from that exposure however my doctor still has me tested for HIV every two years as a result of it.

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. 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.

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 laws if I should happen to be unfortunate enough to be exposed to or contracted 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, HIV, 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. If I contracted a disease from a work related exposure successfully pursuing a claim for that disease would be next to impossible if I couldn't prove that I was exposed to that disease in the course of my employment.

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 timely notification if we receive an exposure from a patient we are treating, in the course of our duties, if that patient has certain types of communicable diseases. This would help 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 are exposed to these diseases while performing our duties as firefighters that we be notified of that in a timely manner. If we do not receive these notifications we not only put ourselves at risk, we also place our families at risk of exposure when we get home from work. We put ourselves in danger every day to protect the citizens that we serve and we are asking you to help better protect us and our families if we find ourselves in that situation in the course of our jobs as firefighter and the passage of SB1010 would certainly assist us in that regard.

I respectfully request that the members of this committee please support SB1010 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.