

**Robert Walsh**  
Hartford Fire Fighters

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Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Dargan and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of this issue and for your consideration into the passage of this bill.

My name is Bob Walsh and for the last 29 years I have been a Hartford Firefighter and currently I am a Deputy Fire Chief in the Hartford Fire Department. For the last 18 years I have served on the Departments Health and Safety Committee. During that time the Health and Safety Committee established an infectious disease policy consistent with the federal Ryan White Act of 1990. Included in that federal act was a responder notification section, which allowed members who were exposed during the course of their work to be evaluated by a physician and be given information about the victim that they treated as to whether that victim had a specific Infectious disease. This information was not wide spread patient history it covered 8 specific infectious diseases.

In the 2006 re-authorization of the federal act the emergency responder notification language was left out creating a significant issue for emergency responders and emergency response agencies.

The Hartford Fire Department responds on average to 24,000 incidents a year with about 14,000 of those being First Responder Emergency Medical Service calls. On average we see between 10 and 15 members exposed a year. Of those 2 to 3 are deemed significant and require additional medical treatment and follow-up care. These exposures are not the result of a careless employee not taking the proper precautions; these exposures are unavoidable because of the circumstances of treating a patient in a completely uncontrollable environment. Members are exposed while performing extrication at accidents, while stabilizing and moving patients on EMS calls and while assisting Ambulance crews carrying victims down stair cases. Members are also exposed while performing rescues during fire situations.

A typical exposure in the Hartford fire Department is handled in the following manner

The member that is exposed notifies his company officer and immediately decontaminates himself. The Officer notifies the Tour Commander who notifies the Departments Designated Office "Ryan White Officer". The exposed member is taken to the same hospital as the victim and is seen by the same physician as the victim. The

physician with the information he has from the victim/patient, discusses the significant of the exposure with the members and makes a determination of what if any follow-up treatment or additional care is necessary.

I feel two things are very important to point out at this time. With the notification section in the law the physician can use information he knows about the victim to guide him in his evaluation and decision making into follow-up treatment for the member.

With out the notification section the physician can not use the victim's information and it is fair to assume that members would be subject to follow-up treatment and exposure to un necessary medical procedures and harsh medications as a precaution. Because this notification section is not available then emergency service organizations and municipalities will have a significant financial impact and increase in Worker Comp due to this precautionary care and most likely significant lost time until a determination can be made and the member returned to duty.

The second important issue is that with the notification section, the Physician can determine that a victim does not have an Infectious Disease and can tell the members relieving the stress on the member.

With out the notification section the member would have to go home to his family and tell them that he was exposed and that he could not find out if the victim had an infectious disease, so they must sit and wait to see what happens. This will change the lives and relationships for that entire family. With the notification section the Physician would counsel the member about the exposure and put the members mind at ease and relieve all of that un necessary stress on that family.

In the proposed bill four infectious diseases have been included that were not part of the original Federal Bill in 1990 but have become very significant to all of us since then and should be included, they are Hepatitis C, Hepatitis A, MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus) and Pandemic Flu.

In closing I would like to thank each of you for your time and consideration in passing this bill into law so that all emergency responder in Connecticut, Fire, Police and EMS can be provided with this critical information in the event that they are exposed while performing their duties

Thank You