

**CONNECTICUT
STATE POLICE UNION**

Good afternoon, Chairman Geragosian, Chairwoman Harp and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Steven Rief, and I am President of the Connecticut State Police Union. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I am here to speak in **OPPOSITION** to:

**Governor M. Jodi Rell's March 1, 2010 Deficit Mitigation Plan:
ITEM #80 A CHANGE IN 100% BENEFIT UNDER WORKER'S COMPENSATION LAW FOR CERTAIN
HAZARDOUS DUTY STATE WORKERS**

I would like to start my testimony by stating that I am a Connecticut State Trooper. I have served the state in this capacity for nearly 21 years. As Union President, I represent approximately 1086 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants. Everyday throughout the State of Connecticut, Troopers risk their lives serving and protecting others in our state. The very existence of police officers, State Troopers, is to ensure that law and order is maintained in our society. We are the thin blue line that is sewn into the fabric of our democracy. Without police officers, State Troopers, society as we know it would no longer exist. It is a job that comes with tremendous responsibility. Our profession is dangerous: One that requires us to act when others flee, to restore order, preserve life, and maintain the safety of our citizens in our communities. While others flee, we cannot. This provides for a clear distinction between our occupational responsibilities as opposed to others. You see, we **INTENTIONALLY** place ourselves in harm's way every day, on and off duty. It is our duty.

The Connecticut State Police have a Code of Honor that says, in part, "*I am a Connecticut State Trooper, a soldier of the law. To me is entrusted the honor of the department. I will serve the State of Connecticut honestly and faithfully and, if need be, lay down my life as others have done rather than swerve from the path of duty...*" We are the ones who are assaulted, shot at, and sometimes killed in the line of duty. We place our bodies, and vehicles, in circumstances that can, and often do, lead to injury. We understand that this is what is required of us in doing our job. You want us, need us, to perform our duties: To move toward the sound of gunfire; Stop our vehicles in the middle of the interstate to protect an accident scene; Respond to calls for service when no one else can, or will. Yet, there are occasions in the discharging these duties that result in physical injury to the Trooper. This can have a significant impact, short and long term. It can have career ending, and/or life altering impacts that affects the Trooper AND their family. In return, we ask that the state also do its job. So that, when we are injured in the line of duty, we do not suffer loss of wages.

A proposal in the Governor's Mitigation Plan, in line item #80, would change the current worker's compensation benefit for certain hazardous duty state employees. Currently, there is a worker's compensation benefit that provides for 100% of a hazardous duty employee's gross salary for certain situations. The change would reduce the benefit to 75% of the employee's net salary. Troopers are only eligible for the 100% rated benefit if they are: 1) injured while on-duty, or while performing their job duty if in an off-duty capacity, and 2) performing a task unique to their job assignment as a Trooper: Merely being injured while getting out of our cruiser at the barracks would not qualify for the higher benefit rate; Becoming injured during an altercation while affecting an arrest would qualify for the higher rating. Troopers, and their families, should not suffer because we are injured while performing our job.

Last year, Governor Rell cut approximately \$1.7 million in worker's compensation benefits in the State Police Budget. As a result of Troopers being injured on the job, due to the dangers of our job assignments, the Governor has amended her FY2011 budget by adding \$1.7 million to cover a short fall of monies due to worker's compensation claims. The demands of our profession continue to exact a toll on our Troopers. We are already significantly understaffed, doing more with less, while also seeing support services to our front line Troopers diminished as department overtime is being cut across the board. What hangs in the balance is a compromise in public safety, our safety, and will surely lead to a greater risk of on-duty injuries. While our Union and the department continues to make strides to improve occupational safety, it is a reality that we have and will continue to have a dangerous workplace environment and thus injuries will continue to occur. I respectfully ask that you oppose the Governor's Mitigation Plan and maintain the current benefit of 100 % workers compensation for certain hazardous duty state employees.

In closing, I would like to thank this committee for your attention to this important issue and I am available to answer questions and provide you with any further information.

CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION
Steven Rief, President

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