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Prepared Comments for Labor & Public Employees Committee

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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Prague, Chairman Ryan, Senator Edwin Gomes, Representative Tim O'Brien and honorable members of the Committee. I am Sergeant Joseph Kennedy, president of the Stamford Police Association. I am here to speak representing 280 members of my department in advocating for a correction to the current state workman's compensation law to better protect Connecticut police officers and the dangers they encounter.

The current workman's compensation law reads that an officer is covered under the law, "provided such police officer is the subject of an attempt **by another person** to cause such police officer serious physical injury or death through the use of deadly force."

This law, while well-intended, leaves a significant loophole which fail to protect our state's first responders in the circumstances they face. It fails to take into account what happens if and when law enforcement officers encounter deadly force from something other than a person.

Much like the United States Marines, police officers as our communities' first responders are asked to arrive at the scene of an emergency and immediately stabilize or size up dangerous situations and come to the aid of victims in peril.

In some cases this means engaging a perpetrator using a deadly weapon, individuals who are enraged or mentally deranged and in situations holding and threatening hostages.

In so many cases this means immediately reacting and coming to the aid of someone who is or has been injured, disabled or threatened with even greater injury, if we do not act immediately.

On February 16, 2009 such an incident took place in North Stamford. Police officers received a call about an animal attack on a human being. The closer officers came to the scene, the more they recognized the seriousness of the situation they were being placed into.

A person was being attacked, mauled and eaten alive by a 200 pound chimpanzee.

When my fellow officers arrived at the scene, seeing the large animal enraged, still attacking and in full assault of a victim – that they could no longer identify as either male or female -- they took immediate action to shield the victim's body with their vehicles and begin rescue operations.

One patrol car was parked to the left and right of the victim to shield her and enable rescue operations to commence. The victim was to the left of Officer Frank Chiafari and to the right of Officer Paul Pavia. Before an ambulance and medics could be brought in, officers needed to secure the crime scene and the unrecognizable, mutilated and profusely bleeding victim.

Only the attacker – in this case a chimpanzee – after a few seconds of retreat, decided to now attack the Stamford Police Officers.

First he came after the passenger's side of the car of Officer Frank Chiafari ripped off the mirror and began rocking the vehicle like a toy. Officer Chiafari could not shoot the enraged animal through the passenger side window, because the homeowner was standing in the distance behind the Chimpanzee, in the crossfire.

Next the bloodied chimpanzee came around the patrol vehicle, opened Officer Chiafari's driver's side door showing his bloody teeth and fangs.

With the squad car's computer terminal to his right, this trapped the officer inside the vehicle, and the chimpanzee blocking the only exit from the vehicle -- the officer was put in a kill or be killed situation.

This was a horrible situation for any officer to be put in and Officer Chiafari who has suffered greatly over the past year will be speaking to you shortly to explain more -- but for officers involved in this or similarly extreme experiences, you can not just shake off with the next call or go home and forget about it.

Nor in the split second they have to react at the emergency scene, should they ever have to wonder if they or their family will be protected should they be seriously harmed in the line of duty. The way the law stands now, officers will have to think twice. This must be corrected and I thank Senator McDonald for proposing the amendment and for the c-chairs calling for this important hearing.

It was after the attack on the victim and Office Chiafari that the nightmare of navigating the workman's compensation system began for this officer.

Just five days after the incident Officer Chiafari received an unsolicited letter from The State of Connecticut saying that.... in their opinion..... he was perfectly fineand suffered no injury or stress from the incident..... denying and immediately washing their hands of any future medical bills.

Over the last year the officer has sought out mental health counseling from the trauma he faced lived through. It has helped this respected veteran officer and was necessary. The law as it is now written makes no allowances for officers like him or others that have to put their lives and body in the line of danger to protect another.

Today, I come before you to ask your support for Senator McDonald's amendment to the Workers Compensation Law as it relates to police officers needing to use deadly force against a dangerous and threatening animal.

We need you to close the loophole in the Workman's Compensation Law to reaffirm to police officers that if they put their lives in danger to protect the citizens of their communities that they will not be abandoned and left alone should they be significantly hurt in the line of duty.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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