

Good morning, Senator Prague and Representative Zalaski, and Distinguished Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

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My name is Andrew Matthews, and I am the President of the Connecticut State Police Union and a Sergeant within the Connecticut State Police. As the Union President, I represent approximately 1,138 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I am here to speak **in FAVOR** of:

**PROPOSED BILL NO. 6408**

**AN ACT CONCERNING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND THE WORKER'S COMPENSATION ACT**

The Connecticut State Police Union membership takes great pride in protecting all of Connecticut's citizens and visitors; however, many times it comes at a significant personal sacrifice. **Often, Police officers, Firefighters and EMS personnel are forced to witness alarming scenes that forever live in their minds, even long after they retire.**

Post-traumatic stress disorder has the potential to occur after exposure to critical incidents and traumatic/shocking events. These critical incidents involve a perceived and/or actual threat of death or serious injury to oneself or others. **As first responders, we not only live with the daily stress of possibly losing our own lives, but we are required to witness the death, injury, violence and trauma to members of the public.** As a result, Police, Fire and EMS have an increased risk of PTSD because of the repeated exposure to these incidents, which could potentially interfere with their ability to perform their duties. At times, it is extremely difficult to be constantly exposed to death, dismembered body parts and/or human remains, especially when it involves an infant or child.

Speaking from personal experience, from 2000-2004, I was a member of our elite State Police Major Crime Unit, which investigates crimes, including, but not limited to, officer involved shootings, suicide by cop, homicides, suicides, serious assaults, infant deaths and even sexual assaults of children. Many of the details and visual experiences are still fresh in my mind today. However, one tragic event that will forever be engrained in my memory occurred on September 2, 2010 when Trooper Ken Hall was killed in the line of duty. As some of you may recall, his cruiser was struck by a reckless operator traveling at a high rate of speed. **Witnessing a fellow officer, lying deceased in the hospital room, with severe bodily injuries has to be one of the most difficult things myself and my colleagues have ever had to witness.**

With the unwavering support of the legislature, the Connecticut State Police offers both our sworn and civilian employees a peer support program called (S.T.O.P.S) State Troopers Offer Peer Support. In just three years, this program has grown to approximately 107 volunteers, who provide confidential support to fellow co-workers during difficult times. The agency also provides mental health professionals and clinicians for those that require the necessary medical assistance. I have personally observed this program save employees' careers and possibly even their lives.

Many Police, Fire and EMS personnel view themselves as "tough" and may even act as if nothing affects them. Many mask the pain with humor, refuse to discuss it for fear they may appear "weak," or even resort to other means to alleviate the pain. Some first responders that suffer from PTSD may have nightmares or even repeatedly relive the event in their mind. The results of these experiences are directly linked to the performance of our duties and any "injury," either physical or mental, should be protected by state statute. In order to ensure that first responders are able to perform properly and provide public safety, we need our legislative leaders to make certain that, when we are in need of assistance, it will be provided without penalty.

Based on the foregoing, **we respectfully request this Committee to pass this legislation.**

**Proposed Statutory Language:**

The Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety **may** place any State Trooper or Department of Public Safety employee on paid administrative leave for the purpose of conducting an administrative review of any incident involving the use of deadly or non-deadly force (Non-deadly force: means any assault or confinement which does not constitute deadly force.) **and/or if the employee is involved in a critical incident. A "Critical Incident" is defined as any situation faced by an employee in the line of duty that has the potential to interfere with his or her ability to perform his or her duties. "Critical Incidents" include, but are not limited to, serious injuries to the employee, serious physical injury or death of a co-worker, exposure to mass casualty incidents, or an incident involving the death of a child.**

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