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SB56



Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, and Honorable Members of this Committee, my name is Christopher Tracy, and I'm here representing the Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut as Vice President and Health & Safety Committee Chair as well as the Fairfield Fire Department as Health & Safety Officer for the last seven years and Safety Committee member for the last quarter century to speak in favor of Senate Bill 56, an Act Concerning Severe Mental or Emotional Impairment and Workers' Compensation Coverage. I was here last year when it was SB823, and if need be I'll be back again next year and the year after until it passes.

That's because the people I represent today, Connecticut's fire fighters, are known as the Bravest for a reason; they're the ones you call when a building like L'Ambiance Plaza collapses and 28 construction workers are killed in Bridgeport; when a fully involved house fire takes the lives of five out of seven occupants on Christmas morning in Stamford; and when an Acela train strikes an Ecuadorian immigrant and her four children walking along the tracks seeking shelter in Fairfield. Connecticut's Bravest respond to emergencies of every shape and size, from the sweeping impact of natural disasters like hurricanes and blizzards to the intimate personal tragedies that take place in homes and businesses across the state. It's what they do: they run into burning buildings when everyone else is running out, and never shirk at the responsibility of tending to civilians in spite of the risks all around them.

What they're not accustomed to – what no one could ever become accustomed to – is running into a school full of children, or a train full of

passengers, or a building full of civilians, or a neighborhood full of residents “whose death or maiming was caused by an intentional act of violence by another human being” such as took place in Newtown, Garden City, New Jersey, Lower Manhattan and Webster, New York in recent years.

Those first responders, and others just like them across Connecticut, were in those places dealing with those scenes as a direct result of their employment, but because of reforms made to Workers Compensation in 1993 their mental health and post-traumatic stress in the aftermath of such events are no longer recognized as a work related injuries. And because they’re expected to respond to the next call, and the next, because the public counts on the Bravest to be there whenever they’re called, they sit through their Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and climb back on their rigs and go back out again. They may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms that hurt their families, their coworkers and even the people who call them, but they continue to respond professionally and save lives in spite of their injuries.

Is anyone “ready to respond to death or maiming caused by an intentional act of violence by another human being as a routine requirement of their job”? Can anyone explain why the mental healthcare that may be needed following such an event by those who’ve responded should not be covered by Workers Compensation? And if we recognize that the natural response to witnessing and mitigating these horrors might reasonably result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder requiring treatment, is there any reason not to vote in favor of SB56?

I’m here today asking that you protect my brother and sister firefighters, our Bravest, and our police officers, and our emergency medical responders, by providing them the small comfort that their care and treatment in the aftermath of events such as these and others yet unimagined will be covered by Workers Compensation. I’m here asking you to vote in favor of SB 56.