



THE OLD STONE HOUSE

Joseph S. Mazza
First Selectman

TOWN OF GUILFORD

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Steve Werbner, Chairman
CCM Labor Relations Committee
CT Conference of Municipalities
900 Chapel Street
New Haven, CT 06510-2807

Dear Chairman Werbner,

I am writing to voice my opposition to SB 56 "An Act Concerning Severe Mental or Emotional Impairment and Worker's Compensation Coverage", as it would mandate a highly subjective and potentially costly unfunded mandate on municipalities.

In addition, SB 56 is overly broad and would expose municipalities to potential fraud:

- It would allow individuals to receive such special benefits based on a diagnosis by a counselor or therapist, based on their witnessing an event or viewing a crime scene hours after an event, regardless of whether they were on-duty or not, or required to be at the scene. It would mandate such special benefits as long as the event was "causally connected with the employee's employment."
- "Visually witnessing" is subject to interpretation and could mean simply viewing photographs or videos of a crime scene, or of the deceased or injured.
- The definition of "death" is also subject to interpretation and could mean someone may not have actually witnessed a person's last breath but, because an individual died at a later date/time and location (i.e. hospital) then, that could be considered "witnessing a death."
- The definition of "maiming" is open to very broad interpretation, forcing municipal officials to devote considerable time and resources to thwart mental disability fraud, which has proven to be not uncommon.

A diagnosis of "mental or emotional impairment as proposed in SB 56, is highly subjective and could overlap with existing symptoms of depression, substance abuse, or other anxiety disorders. SB 56 is also imprecise as it does not distinguish among the spectrum of mental stress diagnoses, thus would cover all judgments from acute stress disorders to post-traumatic stress disorders, to longer-term chronic or delayed onset disorders, essentially creating an open-ended disability.

Towns and cities already offer health insurance, disability leave, and Employee Assistance Programs to employees suffering from mental or emotional impairments. These existing benefits provide employees access to counseling, therapy, and other essential services to assist them and their families during difficult periods.

SB 56 would strain local administrative, forensic, medical, legal and financial resources otherwise devoted to managing other workers' compensation claims submitted by employees with physical injuries.

I firmly believe we have very dedicated emergency service personnel in Guilford and I support them one hundred percent, but this is not the issue. What is at stake is the impact on local property taxpayers and our budgets should the state mandate towns to pay for these special workers' compensation benefits for extremely subjective mental stress claims that occur while not at work.

I appreciate your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Joseph S. Mazza
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CC: Rep. Vincent J. Candelora
State Senator Ed Meyer
State Representative Patricia Widlitz
CCM Labor Relations Committee