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Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan, and Honorable Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, my name is Christopher Tracy and I'm here representing the Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut as Vice President at Large and Health & Safety Committee Chair, as well as the Fairfield Fire Department as Health & Safety Officer and career-long Safety Committee member, to speak in favor of House Bill 5533, an Act Concerning Workers' Compensation Coverage for Public Employees with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. 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 firefighters, are called the Bravest for a reason: they're the ones you call when L'Ambiance Plaza collapses killing twenty-eight construction workers in Bridgeport; when a house fire takes the lives of five of seven occupants on Christmas morning in Stamford; when an Acela train strikes an Ecuadorian immigrant and her four children walking 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, never shirking the responsibility of tending to civilians despite the risks.

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 CT, Garden City NJ, Lower Manhattan and Webster NY in recent years. Those first responders, and others just like them across Connecticut, were in those places dealing with those “traumatic events” 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 immediate aftermath of such events are no longer presumed to be 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 symptoms that affect their families, their coworkers and even the very people who call them, but they continue to respond professionally and save lives in spite of their injuries.

Is anyone ready to respond to “the death or serious bodily injury of one or more human beings caused by an intentional act of another human being” that is “extraordinary due to the number or severity of casualties” as a requirement of their job? Can anyone say why the mental healthcare that may be required by those who’ve responded to such an event should not be covered by Workers Compensation? And if we recognize that the natural response to witnessing and mitigating such horrors might reasonably result in Post-Traumatic Stress requiring treatment, is there any reason not to vote for HB 5533? I’m here today asking that you protect my brother and sister firefighters, 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 HB 5533.