Connecticut Psychiatric Society

A District Branch of the
American Psychiatric Association

Statement in support of Raised Bill 593: AN ACT CONCERNING SEVERE MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENT AND WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE.

Workers' Compensation coverage for mental or emotional impairment without a physical injury was taken away from Connecticut's citizens in 1993. At the time, there was adverse publicity about excessive costs to the workers' compensation system in California which was projected to spread across the country.

Those dire predictions did not come true, but our citizens to this day have been deprived of coverage for experiencing terrible trauma on the job.

Denying them benefits didn't make sense in 1993 and it does not make sense now.

We support this bill, but we also believe it is time for Connecticut to acknowledge that it is not just witnessing an act of violence that should be compensable. Bad things happen in the workplace or in the course of one's employment that are not the fault of any employee and cause serious stress and illness even if the cause is not violence. Such things as a co-worker's serious accident or death, a workplace explosion where one was not injured but feared for his or her life, a workplace fire, can leave mental and emotional scars. These scars can lead to permanent disability, or with proper treatment can be dealt with in a way that returns a worker to productivity.

It's important to note that workers compensation is not automatic and it is not anticipated to be so with this bill either. We don't see any attempt to override the normal checks and balances in place when one applied for workers' compensation, and we certainly would not encourage that.

We would also note that the bill should not limit coverage to a diagnosis of PTSD. PTSD is not the only way that an emotional or mental reaction to a traumatic incident would show up. Severe depression or anxiety could occur and be just as debilitating. Thus we would suggest the substitution of the words "mental disorder" for PTSD.

It is in the best interest of this state to encourage providing the means to intervene early in cases of mental or emotional illness caused by traumatic experiences in the workplace. The result will be a productive workforce and less impact on the resources of the state.

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