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TESTIMONY OF ERIC R. BROWN
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BEFORE THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY – INSURANCE AND
REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE – MARCH 10, 2016

IN SUPPORT OF S.B. No. 367 – An Act Concerning Severe Mental and
Emotional Impairment and Workers’ Compensation Coverage.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen of the Committee. My name is Eric Brown. I am counsel for the Nutmeg Independent Labor Unions. We represent municipal employees throughout the state of Connecticut including school secretaries and police officers. We also represent armed security guards at two universities and one defense contracting firm in Connecticut.

I am speaking to you in favor of **S.B. No. 367 – An Act Concerning Severe Mental and Emotional Impairment and Workers’ Compensation Coverage.**

More than three years ago I was working as staff counsel at AFSCME Council 15 and I represented the brave police officers who responded to the tragedy at Sandy Hook. I remember walking through the police department that day among men and women that I considered friends and observing that they were changed people. They were walking ghosts.

I knew that what they had witnessed that day was a horror, but I could not begin to comprehend the magnitude of that horror. These stoic men and women do not share such details because what they witnessed that day was unspeakable.

In the days and weeks that followed, I began working with their local union leadership to try to secure as many benefits as we could for them as they sought to deal with the emotional aftermath of the tragedy.

At the time, PTSD was beginning to enter the vocabulary of the nation as we watched numbers of men and women come back from overseas wars and struggle to assimilate back into civil society. PTSD, we now know is real and unpredictable. But we also know that when it is acknowledged in a timely manner

and treated appropriately it is readily treatable. PTSD is a disease, like many others, that can be treated. With proper treatment, those affected can continue to perform the duties that they have always performed.

For some reason however, this state has been reluctant to allow workers' compensation benefits for those who suffer from this insidious yet very treatable disease, and other similar diseases.

Currently only 15 states in the union refuse to provide benefits for PTSD or other mental injuries under any circumstances. Connecticut falls into a group with such progressive states as Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky and Idaho.

The time has come to acknowledge that the effects of tragedies like Sandy Hook are very real, and they can have broad financial impacts on our working police officers. We should not require our police officers to go out to protect and serve us, and then when they suffer severe yet treatable injuries, leave them on their own to deal with the aftermath. We should not expect, as a society, for our protectors to solely carry the burden of a disease that is a real occupational hazard.

SB 367 will provide much-needed protection to police officers who suffer severe psychological trauma in the performance of their duties. It is time to pass this important bill into law.