

UNIFORMED PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT

AFFILIATED WITH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

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Good afternoon, Honorable Chairmen Rep. Terzcyak and Sen. Gomes, Honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name are Richard Hart. I represent the Uniformed Professional Firefighters Association of Connecticut which represents 57 Local affiliates of the International Association of Firefighters. Membership in the UPPFA is comprised of approximately 4,000 Union firefighters in Connecticut.

I am speaking today in support of S.B. 134, An Act Concerning Severe Mental and Emotional Impairment and Work's Compensation Coverage.

The typical firefighter's career lasts approximately 20-25 years, some longer. In those years, firefighters are exposed to a variety of emergency situations, the most devastating being the death of another human being. Be it responding to a Christmas morning fire in Stamford, where two adults and three little children died, or, to a motor vehicle accident where a first responder discovers the victim is his son, or an accident so horrific, two kids, the same age as my children rear-ended a parked tractor trailer on I 84, the only thing visible were an arm and two legs. The list of incidences could go on. The effects are not obvious on the surface, but are more subtle. According to the International Association of Firefighters, "Research suggests that the prevalence of PTSD among fire fighters is roughly twice that of the general population and comparable to the prevalence found in cohorts of recent combat veterans, which ranges from 10.1 – 13.8%. A study of 402 professional fire fighters from Germany found a PTSD prevalence of 18.2%, with years on duty as the strongest predictor of PTSD symptoms. The longer a fire fighter is on duty, the more exposure they have to traumatic events throughout the course of their careers. Corneil et al. studied PTSD symptomology in a large population of U.S. and Canadian professional fire fighters and paramedics. The prevalence of PTSD among U.S. and Canadian fire fighters was reported at 22.2% and 17.3%, respectively. Del Ben et al. reported a PTSD prevalence of 8% among 131 U.S. fire fighters from two different states. Firefighters are called upon on

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a daily basis to run at an emergency or disaster when everyone is running away. We do not ask, we do not hesitate, we do not turn away, we react, and we mitigate the situation. Firefighters are called “America’s Bravest” for that reason. What happens though, when an incident or culmination of incidents has such an injurious effect on our first responders that they are unable to cope?

The United States Military recognizes PTSD and treats it. Whether or not they do enough is for another discussion, but the fact remains, it is a legitimate diagnosis. PTSD not only affects the firefighter of police officer, but the potential for them to bring their jobs home to their families is very real, where, if left untreated, the results could be devastating. PTSD is treatable and in most cases, curable. From cognitive therapy, exposure therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), to medication, there are treatment modalities available-without the stigma of PTSD. Because of reforms made to Workers Compensation regulations in 1993, their mental health and post-traumatic stress in the aftermath of such events are no longer recognized as a work related injuries, therefore early intervention and treatment is not immediately available as a work related injury. Allowing for sufficient time to receive treatment without the need to rush back to work will only aid in the recovery and return to duty of our personnel. The overarching principle should be the mental wellbeing of our “Bravest” so they are operating at 100%, 100% of the time. It is time to provide this vital coverage for our “Bravest” and “Finest” to ensure they are fit for duty when the public needs them.

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