Good morning Senator Tim Larson, Senator Tony Guglielmo, Representative Joe Verrengia, Representative J.P. Sredzinski and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. My name is Andrew Matthews, President of the Connecticut State Police Union and Chairman of the National Troopers Coalition. The State Police Union represents approximately 1,021 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants. We are here to speak in FAVOR of:

PROPOSED BILL NO. 763

AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS’ COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR POLICE OFFICERS, FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

The Connecticut State Police Union membership takes great pride in protecting all of Connecticut’s citizens and visitors. However, many times that protection comes at a significant personal sacrifice. Often, Police Officers, Fireman, and EMS personnel are forced to witness alarming scenes that forever live in their minds, even long after they retire.

Post-traumatic stress disorder has the potential to occur after exposure to critical incidents and traumatic/shocking events. These critical incidents involve a perceived and/or actual threat of death or serious injury to oneself or others. As first responders, we not only live with the daily stress of possibly losing our own lives but we are required to witness the death, injury, violence and trauma to members of the public. As a result, Police, Fire and EMS personnel are at increased risk of PTSD because of the repeated exposure to these incidents, which could potentially interfere with their ability to perform their duties. At times, it is extremely difficult to be constantly exposed to death, dismembered body parts and/or human remains, especially when it involves children.

With the unwavering support of the legislature, the Connecticut State Police offers both our sworn and civilian employees a peer support program called (S.T.O.P.S) State Troopers Offer Peer Support. Since 2007, this program has trained approximately 123 volunteers, who provide confidential support to fellow co-workers during difficult times. I have personally witnessed how this program has saved employees’ careers and even their lives. Although our agency provides mental health professionals for those who require additional medical treatment, sometimes mental injuries can be debilitating. As a result, a manifestation of psychological injuries incurred during employment should be viewed no differently than physical injuries sustained while conducting our hazardous duties. An injury to the brain, a vital organ of our body, needs to be treated and triaged in the same manner that we care for a physical injury. Additionally, we need to recognize if we provide immediate care and treatment, under workers’ compensation, the recovery rate for these acute traumatic injuries will improve and will allow employees to continue being productive employees with the understanding their mental and physical health is a priority to their employers.

Many Police, Fire and EMS personnel view themselves as “tough” and may even act as if nothing affects them. Many mask the pain with humor, refuse to discuss it for fear it may appear “weak” or even resort to other resources to alleviate the pain. Some first responders who suffer from PTSD may have nightmares or may even repeatedly re-live the event in their mind. The results of these experiences are directly linked to the performance of our duties and any “injury” either physical or mental, should be protected by state statute. To ensure your first responders can properly respond and provide public safety, we need our legislative leaders to make certain any assistance needed is provided without penalty.

Based on the foregoing, we respectfully request this Committee to pass this critical legislation.

February 16, 2017

CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION

Andrew Matthews, Esq. - President