

Dear Planning and Development Committee Members,

My name is Stephen Burke. I am a retired 34 year veteran of Law Enforcement. Im writing to you today over a crucial bill that comes before you. I have nothing to personally gain from this bill. This bill can literally make the difference between life and death for a first responder. Although all first responders are critical and make huge personal sacrifices to serve the members of their communities, as a matter of integrity I am only going to speak about Police Officers because they are the ones I know best and give personal experience about.

Every few days a police officer sacrifices their life somewhere in this country in a job related situation. Thousands more are injured either intentionally or accidentally. The end result for the injured officer comes down to whether they can return to work or not. If they cannot return to work who is going to provide for them and their family when they are no longer able to?

What I am here to provide this committee with is an inside look of something they will never see unless they are or know an injured first responder. In the beginning soon after the injury in some cases there is a lot of media attention and in others there isn't any. In most cases either way the word usually gets out and contributions flow in. The media supports the officer and his family. Friends, colleges and relatives are there to help, emotionally, financially and physically. As time wears on the gestures of goodwill start to dry up. People move on with their lives as with any crisis that doesn't personally affect them. No longer do the visits come, the meals brought, the checks or donations and the family is now left in an intermediate stage.

The intermediate stage is where the officer is still trying to recover from his injuries and make it back to work. Its a time where fear and uncertainty begin to creep in and lift their ugly heads. The bills are starting to roll in and stack up. Negotiations begin with workers comp and short and long term disability insurance carriers. Whats covered, what isn't and for how long will they pay. The officer struggles in their rehabilitation and therapy. It begins to become a realization that the officer may never return to work and panic sets in on how they are going to survive on an unplanned forced retirement with reduced income.

The officer has discussions with his family about belt tightening. Cutting unnecessary expenses as they are now falling behind financially. Its beginning to become a reality that the officer is too injured to return to work. That their bills exceed the 66 percent income they are now receiving. This isn't because they are lazy because honestly its much easier all the way around to return to work both financially and mentally. The reality settles in their kids will have to drop out of their favorites sports and activities as the resources are no longer there. No more eating out for dinner. No more vacations. House and car payments become the priority as do all the other necessary bills in life.

The next phase is the outcome. This is the most critical phase as this is how the injured employee will from this point on survive. There is no going back. This is the phase in which the injured officer and his family will forever remember exactly how the community repays them for putting their lives on the line everyday for the good of the community. How the community takes care of those officers who were injured by doing nothing other than what was expected of them. This is when anxiety turns to depression. Abandonment turns to bitterness and thoughts of suicide prevail as often the injuries leave the scar of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), financially loss and physical disability to contend with.

When the community doesn't properly take care of a first responder who has given it their all day in and day out its possibly one of the worst feelings in the world. A feeling of utter disbelief and abandonment. Not only can they no longer do the things they enjoy with their family physically but also financially. In some cases they can't walk on the beach, can't work another job, can't maintain their own yard or plan any vacations. Every day there's a struggle for mere survival. Its an inescapable 24/7 prison within their own home.

The officer begins to question his/her own worth. No longer providing for the family and now becoming the anchor sinking it. They seriously consider whether the family would be better off if they commit suicide and they day dream about how to do it with the least impact on the family while still accomplishing what they need to. They think maybe if I'm gone my spouse will move on and find happiness and not have to worry about taking care of me. Find a good provider for my kids. The family will no longer have to worry if my health will deteriorate over time leaving them even worse off. Giving what they think is a fresh start and a new lease to find happiness and security for their beloved families.

Now comes this committees and the Legislature's work. How to strike a balance between right and wrong fair and unjust. How to walk away from the mess that someone else will forever live and know deep in your heart you did the right thing for every side involved. With some deep thought the choice is simple. Uphold yourself sense of decency and take care of these hurting workers and their families who have become victimized by the system. Would you be able to survive even in good health on an unplanned reduction of 66 percent in your income? Please take into consideration the devastating effects these injuries have caused and the limited options they create.

This bill does not mandate the state to force towns and cities to do anything. It simply allows a vehicle by which the towns and cities can make their own decisions on what's right and how to take care of their job related injured first responders. Personally I take issue with the fact that it requires a supermajority and not just 51 percent of city councilors to take care of responders. I would encourage the powers to be to amend this section of the bill to simply be 51 percent of the quorum sitting at the time.

I would like to thank everyone for indulging me and patiently reading through my long explanation to get a true feel for what's really at stake here.

Sincerely,

Stephen P. Burke