



Labor & Public Employees Committee

February 18, 2021

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent 99% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

SB 141 An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation Coverage For Current And Former Members Of Paid Municipal Or Volunteer Fire Departments.

CCM **opposes** this bill as it would reverse the multi-party and bipartisan agreement that was reached in 2016 in enacting PA 16-10.

SB 141 would, among other things, mandate that professional and volunteer firefighters who are diagnosed with cancer, acquired through their occupational exposure, be eligible for workers' compensation and other benefits, including death benefits. **The proposal, as drafted in SB 141, would establish an unfunded state mandate by significantly expanding the workers' compensation benefits system and** disregard the bipartisan agreement that was reached in 2016.

In 2016, CCM was part of a bipartisan effort to address cancer amongst firefighters. As a result of that effort Connecticut created a process and program to assist firefighters when they have exhausted their health and sick benefits to ensure that they are still able to receive the necessary treatment and be able to provide financial support for their families. During those careful deliberations, the topic of developing a presumption under workers compensation law consumed much discussion. After careful dialogue with stakeholders, including municipal officials, firefighters, insurance carriers and the Workers Compensation Commission, it was determined a presumption would be a costly and undue burden.

The Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) has determined that similar proposals to SB 141 will result in a "...cost to municipalities that will be determined by (1) the frequency of claims filed and (2) the severity of the claim (e.g., the extent of medical treatment and lost wage benefits), which are highly variable..."¹ Additionally, OFA has concluded that the "costs associated with providing medical care, lost wages and other indemnity benefits would be significantly higher than other categories of claims within the workers' compensation system. **A single cancer claim may exceed \$1 million over the life of the claim.**"²

¹ OFA Fiscal Note, HB 5871, 2015

² OFA Fiscal Note No. 101, HB 6194, 2009



Municipalities are already grappling with difficult budget choices as they work to maintain current service levels without unduly burdening local property taxpayers, which is even more difficult because of the Pandemic. These highly variable factors would create more instability in the municipal budgeting process and exacerbate the fiscal difficulties towns and cities are already facing.

Alternative Approach

CCM acknowledges the dangers that our municipal firefighters face. We are grateful for the commitment they have made to protect and serve Connecticut's residents. Local officials have long supported these employees and their just compensation when injuries occur on duty and as a result of their work. As an alternative to creating a presumption under workers compensation, CCM would suggest the following to strengthen current efforts:

- Maintain the State's commitment in supporting firefighters by **increasing and securing a reliable funding stream for the Firefighter Cancer Relief Fund;**
- Provide support to Connecticut firefighters by **providing financial assistance for the purchasing of multiple pairs of firefighter personal protective equipment** (i.e. turnout gear). If firefighters had access to multiple gear they would be able to ensure they are not using contaminated gear before they could be properly washed.
- Provide a state grant for fire departments to purchase (a) washing machines and (b) on scene equipment to assist in decontamination of fire gear.
- Support efforts for firefighters to (a) routinely be screened for cancer, (b) encourage firefighters to clean vulnerable areas for carcinogen exposure, such as the face, neck and groin, and (b) ensure firefighters maintain proper usage of their self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).

Unfortunately, the State has not provided the necessary support and assistance to maintain funding for the Firefighter Cancer Relief Fund. In addition to ensuring the funding be allocated, other efforts can be done to enhance protection for firefighters. Imposing an unfunded mandate by creating a presumption as proposed in SB 141 would not accomplish such effort, rather only impose a greater burden on property taxpayers.

CCM urges the Committee to **take no action** on SB 141.

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If you have any questions, please contact Mike Muszynski (mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org or 203-500-7556) or Zach McKeown (zmckeown@ccm-ct.org or 860-462-9556) of CCM.