



## **Ohio House Insurance Committee**

### **BWC Budget Amendment**

#### **Making First Responders w-Employment-Related PTSD Eligible for Workers' Comp**

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

Chairman Brinkman, Vice Chair Henne, Ranking Member Bocchieri, my name Dustin McKee and I am the Policy Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio. NAMI Ohio is the statewide association that serves as the voice on mental illness in Ohio. Our mission is “to improve the quality of life, ensure dignity and respect for persons with serious mental illness, and to support their families.” Established in 1983, NAMI Ohio is comprised of thousands of family members, consumers, advocates and professionals working together to ensure that Ohioans with mental illness and their loved ones receive the treatment and support they need. NAMI Ohio has a network of 40 local affiliates which provide education, support and advocacy to individuals and families living with mental illness.

This amendment is of particular interest to NAMI Ohio because we see it as a way of giving back to law enforcement officers who have given so much for our loved ones with mental illness. In Ohio, thousands of law enforcement officers have participated in Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. This training gives officers the skills to recognize and de-escalate a mental health crisis. Often times CIT officers are the first to arrive at a scene involving somebody threatening to take their own life. In many instances they are successful in convincing the person not to harm him or herself, but there are times when they are not. These situations are extremely stressful for law enforcement officers and can result in multiple traumas and PTSD. When that happens, we want to ensure that the officers have the services and supports they need to take care of their own mental health.

Most of us admire the strength and sacrifice it takes to perform duties that are commonplace for law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians.

First responders rush to the scene of grisly car accidents, house fires, bloody crimes, and unspeakable human suffering. Witnessing such events can change the way the brain functions, especially with severe or repeated exposure to trauma. As a result, the person may feel like the event is happening over and over again, resulting in PTSD symptoms. These include severe anxiety, sleeplessness, anger, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, and the inability to perform their job.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms usually begin within three months of the incident but occasionally emerge years afterward. They must last more than a month to be considered PTSD. The course of the illness varies. Some people recover within 6 months, while others have symptoms that last much longer.

PTSD not only affects the first responder, but gone untreated it can adversely affect the lives of his or her loved ones. Because PTSD symptoms can cause a person to act in ways that may be hard for family members to understand, loved ones often feel helpless and hopeless. Studies show that children of a parent with PTSD experience more behavioral problems than those who do not have a parent with the diagnosis. It is not uncommon for a child in such a situation to mimic their parent's dysfunctional behavior. For instance, they become depressed if their parent is depressed, or they copy their parent's aggressive or violent behavior if their parent's symptoms include that behavior. This can interfere with a child's ability to have healthy relationships and succeed in school.

The good news is that treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder works for most people. With support, individuals with PTSD are able to overcome debilitating memories and get their lives back. However, just as with other major injuries, treatment takes time. Time away from work is necessary to focus on getting well.

On behalf of NAMI Ohio, I ask that you adopt this amendment. Thank you.