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Senate General Government & Agency Review

May 20, 2020

Testimony on Substitute House Bill 308

Chair Schuring, Vice-Chair Rulli, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the committee,

I am Mike Weinman, a retired Columbus police officer who now serves as director of government affairs for the FOP. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the 25,000 active and retired FOP members from every corner of Ohio to urge you to support Sub. HB 308 that would treat post-traumatic stress disorder like any other on the job injury.

The FOP firmly asks you to vote in favor of requiring the Bureau of Workers Compensation to cover post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for first responders without an accompanying injury. The FOP has been fighting for PTSD to be covered by BWC for nearly nine years. Previous PTSD bills have passed the Senate, it was made part of the BWC budget bill this session before being omitted, and now Sub. HB 308 comes before you after having passed the House with a vote of 74-22. Over a dozen States now require their worker's comp systems to cover PTSD for first responders. It is critically important to provide coverage, through BWC, for first responders who experience PTSD. Failing to treat PTSD often leads to death through suicide and creates on the job issues such as avoidance and hypersensitivity. Once identified, PTSD can be treated effectively, allowing first responders to continue their careers serving their communities and our great state.

The bill is limited to first responders and one mental health condition: PTSD. We are sure you have heard arguments that this change in law will open floodgates of claims bankrupting BWC. BWC is more than solvent; they have given billions in rebates over the last several years and have consistently implemented further rate cuts for public employers. It should be noted that the fiscal impact dropped from nearly \$200M a year to \$44M a year under new leadership at the BWC.

Early retirements are not the goal of the FOP. Getting treatment for PTSD is the goal. As the VA has shown, and as other proponents have testified, PTSD is treatable, and those who suffer from it can continue to have productive careers. However, ignoring PTSD destroys families and lives. The organization Blue H.E.L.P. recorded seven Ohio police officer suicides in 2019. Your vote for Sub. HB 308 will be rewarded in the officers you will save and the families that will be preserved.

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