



*BEFORE THE SENATE GENERAL GOVERNMENT & AGENCY REVIEW
COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 384*

Chairman Schuring, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the Senate General Government & Agency Review Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 384 (SB 384). My name is Kevin Shimp and I am the Director of Labor and Legal Affairs for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

When I testified in opposition to House Bill 308 in front of this committee on June 3, 2020 and last month, I urged this committee to consider alternative avenues to providing Ohio's peace officers, firefighters, and emergency medical workers with medical and time off benefits. The bill before you today – SB 384 – is one such alternative approach that grants first responders diagnosed with PTSD arising out of their employment with employer paid medical and time off benefits.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce supports the coverage laid out in SB 384 because it provides our first responders who experience PTSD with more treatment options while also preserving the integrity of the state's workers' compensation system since the additional coverage is provided entirely outside the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation.

Under SB 384, the State Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Coverage Fund is created and housed at the Ohio Department of Public Safety. The fund is designed for the sole purpose of providing first responders diagnosed with PTSD arising from their employment with paid time off and medical benefits. The benefits available to first responders' mirrors Ohio's workers' compensation benefit, so an eligible first responder will receive medical care with no out of pocket costs to them and receive a paid time off benefit equal to 2/3 their average weekly wage should their diagnosis prevent them from working.

These benefits provided under SB 384 mirror the benefits given under House Bill 308 since each bill will enable a first responder who is diagnosed with PTSD arising from their employment with employer paid medical treatments that has zero out of pocket costs for the individual. Each bill also gives first responders a wage replacement benefit should their PTSD prevent them from working totaling 2/3 their average weekly wage. The only difference in available benefits between the two bills is that in an effort to

contain the costs this additional coverage will have on Ohio's cities, counties, townships, and other public employers, SB 384 limits benefits after two years while HB 308 would allow first responders to retire and receive these benefits in perpetuity.

The Ohio Chamber would like to thank the leadership of Senator Hackett who along with other lawmakers worked with the business community to develop this alternative proposal to providing more PTSD benefits for our first responders. These efforts culminated in the introduction of SB 384 which will give first responders more treatment options for PTSD without opening up Ohio's workers' compensation system to the unintended consequences of covering a purely mental condition for an entire class of employees.

In closing, the Ohio Chamber supports SB 384 because it provides first responders in Ohio with additional treatment options for PTSD that is outside of the state's workers' compensation system. And unlike House Bill 308, SB 384 alleviates the Chamber's concerns about the potential expansion of workers' compensation coverage to include covering all mental conditions for all classes of employees when the system has been designed to only cover physical injuries and mental conditions arising from a physical injury.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today, and I will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have for me.