



FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE OF OHIO, INC.

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Good Morning Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chairman Hottinger and Ranking member Craig,

My name is Jay McDonald and I am the Immediate Past President of the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio and also the Legislative Chair for our organization. Additionally, I am the National Vice President of the Fraternal Order of Police. I am here as a voice for the 25,000 active and retired law enforcement members who make up the membership of the Ohio FOP. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

HB 80 takes a major and absolutely necessary step towards providing support to peace officers, fire fighters and emergency medical service workers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. We've been discussing similar legislation for several years and there have been many hours of testimony on the topic.

House Bill 80 is very narrowly drafted to apply only to 1st Responders. That's because our occupations are not only dangerous, they are also uniquely stressful. Our members are present for the worst tragedies, the most horrific incidents and the aftermath of each and we ask them to do it for 25 or 30 years. The cumulative nature of this work stress can be incredibly damaging for first responders just as it's proven dangerous for members of our military. Importantly, it also impacts different people in different ways.

What are some of the impacts of this job-related stress? First, PTSD and depression rates among firefighters and police officers have been found to be as much as five times higher than the rates within the civilian population, which causes these first responders to commit suicide at a considerably higher rate (firefighters: 18/100,000; police officers: 17/100,000; general population 13/100,000). Second, substance abuse is twice as prevalent in law enforcement as it is in the general population. Self-medicating mental illness is a major reason for this disturbing statistic. Third, experts describe the shame and stigma surrounding mental health within professions that prioritize bravery and toughness, and the public remains largely unaware of these issues, since the vast majority of first responder suicides are not covered by the mainstream media.

We understand that there's concern from some that this legislation would set a dangerous precedent for Workers' Compensation coverage of mental health related injuries. Some in the business community have fought this legislation for six years, killing it in each and every general assembly. It's time to understand that this legislation works to protect a narrow sub group of workers. It's time for the business community to support those workers. First responders run towards danger on behalf of the communities they serve and it's time for all of us to support them after they do so.

There is a growing national crisis in law enforcement recruitment and retention. The first thing this state should do about that issue is to make it easier to keep the cops you have. HB 80 does just that. Under current law, you qualify for a disability through Ohio's pension system if you have job related PTSD. We can force you out of your career, but we will not provide you treatment, so you can continue working and can continue to serve your community. Keep in mind that the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund had 13 disability judgments each in 2016 and 2017. This isn't an issue that will bankrupt the state, but it means the world to those first responders who need and seek help.



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At the end of the day, the questions are simple. Is PTSD an injury that can be caused by the employment of our First Responders? Can we do something about it? The answer to question 1 is yes. And the answer to number 2 is "pass House Bill 80."

And so, we urge you to do just that. Pass HB 80 with the provision that allows Ohio's First Responders to seek coverage through the Bureau of Workers' Compensation.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today.

Jay McDonald
Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio Legislative Chairman

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