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Ralph D. Fizer Jr. Sheriff

Proponent testimony on Sub. HB 81

By: Brian L. Prickett, Chief Deputy Clinton County Sheriff's Office

On behalf of the Buckeye State Sheriff's Association

February 12, 2020

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Hottinger, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Insurance Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Sub. House Bill 81.

My name is Brian L. Prickett and I am the Chief Deputy of the Clinton County Sheriff's Office. During my 36 year career as a Deputy Sheriff, I have had the opportunity to see many changes in the public safety workplace. These changes range from; replacing certified peace officers with civilian corrections officers working in jails, increased exposure to biological hazards and more recently, exposure to drugs such as Fentanyl and synthetic drugs, often referred to as "Bath Salts".

In my opinion, Corrections officer's face biological exposures on a more regular basis than many law enforcement officers. My reasoning behind this statement has to do with the environment in which they work as well as the individuals they deal with on a daily basis. As we all know many individuals being housed in our correctional facilities today are known to have some form of Hepatitis, are known intravenous drug users and have mental health issues. Because of these issues, many of these individuals act out by means of self-mutilation, spitting or through exposure of other bodily fluids directed at the officer. In short, a correctional officer should be provided the same post exposure testing and after care as their fellow Peace Officers, Firefighters and EMS personnel.

In addition to adding detention facility employees to the current language, I feel it is important to expand the types of exposure for all emergency service workers. Currently biological hazards are the only exposure addressed but exposures to drugs such as opiate based products and synthetic drugs would be extremely important to the Emergency Services industry. I'm sure we have all heard the stories on the news of officers that were exposed to Fentanyl and had to have Narcan dispensed to them for medical care. While this might seem like a short term medical issue, we really don't know what the future holds as it relates to these exposures. That is why it is important to address how we handle these types of claims now instead of later and this legislation can provide that path.

On April 13, 2019, a Corrections Officer from the Clinton County Sheriff's Office was exposed to an unknown white powder. Shortly after that exposure the Corrections Officer began to feel ill and went to the Jail Nurse, who determined that due to the Corrections Officers symptoms, he should be seen at the Emergency Room. The Officer was treated and released by the local Emergency Room. The claim was subsequently denied. We as the employer, in support of our employee requested that the decision be appealed and it too was denied without the employee being given an opportunity to speak. While the record reflects the decision was based on the medical records, there are things that emergency services workers are exposed to that may never show up in a blood panel. It also disturbs me that the employee is forced to file a health insurance claim and is required to pay a deductible for doing their job.

My purpose for testifying today focuses on one thing, and that is the safety and long term health of our employees as well as all emergency service workers state-wide. We have a duty as legislators and employers to protect all of our public safety workers. Providing legislation in a way that will not only protect, but give these officers the peace of mind to know everything possible is being done to help them is critical.

Mr. Chairman, members, I respectfully request your support in providing legislation that will give all public safety personnel the medical care and benefits they deserve.

Mr. Chairman, members, I would like to Thank you for taking the time to consider this important legislative change.

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