

House Public Insurance & Pension Committee
Proponent - PTSD Amendment [AM_136_0219-1] to HB 81
Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation Budget

Steven Stein, Government Affairs Director
Ohio Association of Professional Fire Fighters & President of Local 67 - Columbus

March 12, 2025

Chairperson Peterson, Vice Chair Teska, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House Public Insurance & Pension Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of the proposed amendment [AM_136_0219-1] to HB 81, which will allow firefighters and other first responders diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to receive compensation and benefits under Ohio's Workers' Compensation Law, regardless of an accompanying physical injury.

I stand before you today representing the Ohio Association of Professional Fire Fighters (OAPFF) and the thousands of men and women who dedicate their lives to protecting the people of Ohio. Our members respond to the worst moments in people's lives—rushing into burning buildings, rescuing victims from horrific car crashes, and performing CPR on children who never take another breath. These experiences take an immense toll on those who serve. While physical injuries are common in our line of work, the invisible wounds we carry are just as devastating, if not more so.

For too long, Ohio's workers' compensation system has failed to recognize PTSD as a compensable condition unless it is accompanied by a physical injury. This outdated policy ignores the science and reality of what first responders endure. PTSD is not a choice—it is a consequence of repeated exposure to traumatic events. It affects our ability to work, our relationships with our families, and our overall well-being. Without proper treatment and financial support, too many first responders suffer in silence, leading to burnout, substance abuse, and even suicide.

The amendment to HB 81 is a necessary step forward in ensuring that Ohio's firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical personnel receive the mental health care they deserve. This legislation does not seek to create a handout; rather, it ensures that first responders who experience PTSD as a direct result of their service can access treatment and compensation to recover and return to duty when they are ready.

Many states have already taken action to recognize PTSD as a work-related condition for first responders, and Ohio should not fall behind. The cost of inaction is far greater than the investment in this amendment. When first responders do not get the help they need, we see an increase in mental health crises, resignations from the profession, and tragically, lives lost to suicide. The Bureau of Workers' Compensation budget must reflect our commitment to those who risk everything to keep our communities safe.

On behalf of the OAPFF, I urge this committee to support the PTSD amendment to HB 81 and ensure that Ohio's firefighters and first responders have the resources necessary to heal from the unseen injuries of their service. We have always been there for our communities. It is time for Ohio to be there for us.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.