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Testimony on Senate Bill 118

Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions

April 17, 2018

Chairman Hottinger and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brian Steel and I'm here today to give proponent testimony to Senate Bill (SB) 118 on behalf of the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio (FOP). Currently, I'm a sergeant with the largest police agency in Ohio, while also serving as a legislative agent for the FOP. I am proud to represent over 25,000 full time law enforcement professionals who risk their lives on a daily basis protecting members of our communities.

The FOP strongly supports SB 118, and thanks Senator LaRose and Senator Brown for their sponsorship along with the co-sponsors.

The VA writes that, "PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault". The year 2013 saw changes to PTSD diagnosis when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) revised the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5). There are seven criteria that need to be met in order to be diagnosed with PTSD. PTSD should not be confused with Acute Stress Disorder which can be treated in one month.

This FOP supported bill would mandate that PTSD be treated like other work-related injuries (which PTSD surely is for some in our membership) and that those who experience this work related injury would not be treated disparately.

Currently, BWC will cover PTSD but only in the event that a physical injury caused the disorder. However, PTSD doesn't generally work this way as it is a mental health issue.

The FOP of Ohio believes that the projections given by the past Director of BWC about the amount of police/fire personnel who would seek PTSD related claims are vastly overstated. In fact, our members can currently be awarded a full disability pension for PTSD, but only thirteen individuals did so in each of 2012 and 2013, proving that there will not be a rush to seek claims.

PTSD is rare, it is treatable and by providing coverage to Ohio's first responders, Ohio legislators can help save careers, save families and most importantly, save lives from suicide.

Chairman Jay Hottinger
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Colorado, Vermont, New York and Texas recently have passed PTSD legislation to provide workers compensation coverage for first responders. Florida has passed it out of the Senate and it has recently passed the House. Several states, and the federal government, already provide this type of coverage. Ohio should make sure its protectors are similarly protected. Our members deserve no less!

Obtaining coverage through the Ohio workers compensation system for police and fire personnel who are diagnosed with PTSD is a top priority for our 25,000 members. And, on behalf of the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony to SB 118. I will be happy to address any questions that you may have at this time.