

Testimony in support of SB 496

Submitted by Joe Baessler, Political Director, Oregon AFSCME

My name is Joe Baessler and I work for Oregon AFSCME and we represent 24,000 workers around the state in the public and private sector. A number of our workers are public safety officers and we were very supportive of the original creation of the Oregon Public Safety Memorial Fund in 1999. There was a need to have a fund to help public safety officers in Oregon who were killed in the line of duty or who were inflicted with a permanent total disability. That original bill was written to address deaths or total and permanent disabilities as follows: "Qualifying death or disability" means death or permanent total disability (PTD) suffered by a public safety officer while on or off duty that is the direct or proximate result of:

- An enforcement action, an emergency response or public safety training for an enforcement action or emergency response that the public safety officer is authorized or obligated to perform by law, rule, regulation or condition of employment or service; or
- An act committed against the public safety officer because of the public safety officer's position as a public safety officer.

The original law however, had one oversight. Some deaths are not "direct or proximate to an enforcement action", but deadly just the same such as an occupational exposure. SB 496 will correct that oversight. SB 496 will create a narrow exception that will recognize an injury or occupational disease that is compensable and accepted under Chapter 656 (workers' compensation) is a qualifying injury or death.

Right now public safety officers who have died due to an accepted occupational disease or injury have been denied benefits from the Public Safety Memorial Fund. While this is rare it is devastating. No matter what happens these situations will continue to be devastating to the families of public safety officers who give their lives or suffer a PTD in the course of their work, but SB 496 will help.

Oregon AFSCME supports public sector workers who are killed or disabled in the line of duty and we believe that they and their families should get even bit of help possible. This could be one of our members who work in a prison or a firefighter or a state police officer, we stand united to protect the families of our public safety workers.

Thank you for your time and please support SB 496.