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TO: Chair Taylor
Vice-Chair Knopp
Members of the Committee on Senate Workforce

FR: Jess Giannettino Villatoro, Political Director, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: Support for SB 507, Critical Workers Compensation Protections for Public Safety Workers

March 19, 2019

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. We're proud to support SB 507 to ensure that public safety personnel such as firefighters and corrections officers can get the care they need after traumatic on-the-job experiences.

The more we learn about the connection to on-the-job injuries and the correlated post-traumatic stress rates it becomes undeniable that we must update the workers compensation statutes. SB 507 ensures that public safety officers don't have to worry about proving their mental illness, in addition to the stress that they're already bearing from a traumatic work experience. SB 507 creates a presumption of PTSD for on the job injuries for this relatively small group of workers.

The Oregon AFL-CIO was a key partner in the Mahonia Hall Reforms, and strongly supports the MLAC process. However, we can't expect that all the policies agreed to in 1990 won't ever need to be updated. While we should strive for consensus in the process, we should also recognize that some changes to the system may be necessary even if both sides can't agree. SB 507 has arisen out of a clear need by a very specific set of workers to ensure that they are safe and can keep serving our communities.

Research supports a glaring 22% of firefighters suffer from PTSD and over 50% have thought about suicide. The cost of inaction on SB 507 could not be greater. The Oregon AFL-CIO is proud to support firefighters, public safety officers, and corrections officers to ensure that they have the workers compensation policies that support them. We strongly encourage a yes vote on SB 507.

