

Senate Workforce Chair Taylor and Vice Chair Knopp, Committee Members,

For the record I'm Karl Koenig President of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council and spokesperson for the Coalition of Public Safety worker's bringing forward the issue of workplace exposure to traumatic events also known as the PTSD/PTSI Bill or SB 507HB 2418. We are approximately 15,000 Police Officers, Career Paid Fire Fighters, Corrections Officers and Dispatchers throughout the entire State of Oregon.

We are testifying in support of SB 507. This Bill represents a primary focus of the professions listed as it relates to Mental Health Occupational Exposures in the workplace and this Legislative session. When the Coalition began this journey we reached out to the stakeholders and asked for comments and concerns, hearing no protest that these events occur but often concerned about "in material" and costs. As most insurers argue any time you presume anything it opens a proverbial Pandora's box of abuse and uncontrolled costs. We listened to their concerns and comments and offer the following for your consideration;

- 1) Five (5) industry accepted Mental Health Occupational Disease diagnoses defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental Disorders (commonly referred to as DSM 5) made by only three types of Mental Health Professionals, Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, Psychologist or a Psychiatrist ,
- 2) A well defined population of public safety employees, approximately 15,000 in number. Corrections, Dispatchers, Police Officers and Career Paid Fire Fighters
- 3) the eligibility time parameters for the beginning and end of a persons career, two years cumulative and 84 months after retirement and acknowledges the sentinel events that shake the entire country at the date of the employees' hire.
- 4) The injury must have been when performing the duties of the job such as on a shooting, loss of life call, riot, initial call screening, natural or man made disaster

You will hear testimony following mine that depicts a Public Safety world unanticipated by Mahonia Hall reforms of the early 1990's. As a career fire fighter paramedic who goes on the calls, deals with subordinate employees in crisis, brought unlikely partners together to fund Peer support training for fire fighters and continues to advocate for those in crisis who may not be able to help themselves, we think the time is right.

SB 507 responsibly reverses a law that requires the public safety employee, during their worst possible time of crisis defend themselves in a process that currently is out of balance.

The data shows early treatment, properly trained peer support, qualified mental health care providers and reducing the stigma of reporting help in the return to work. In fact this very session, the Legislation for mandatory Wellness for Law Enforcement officers passed out of committee and on to the floor for a 30-0 vote in this chamber. Clearly acknowledging there is a problem and part of the solution is officer wellness. It is only one piece of the solution, the final piece is recognition that the workplace has a responsibility to cover the properly diagnosed Mental Health Injuries sustained while serving Oregon's citizens.

SB 507 does not change the penalties for false reporting a workers compensation claim. A Class A misdemeanor will effectively end a public safety officer's career by false reporting.

There are some 250 Bills this session alone that deal with Mental Health and Suicide. This Bill deserves your consideration for those of us who are at their lowest point in their careers with Mental Health issues arising out of our occupation.

I will end my testimony with the following, we know there are workplace exposures that have a profound effect on a public safety professional's career. It can be positive, personally enriching and knowing we are doing the right thing. Unfortunately it can also effect their mental health, livelihood, their families and the public we serve. It is time to right an unanticipated societal change and pass SB 507 out of Committee with a do pass recommendation.

Our Council Nelson Hall will provide testimony to the amendments and be able to answer any technical issues relating to the bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Karl Koenig  
President  
Oregon State Fire Fighters Council