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Sponsor Testimony on Senate Bill 118
Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee
November 14th 2017

Chairman Hottinger, Vice Chair Hackett, members of the Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 118. This legislation will ensure that Ohio's brave first responders get the coverage they deserve to aid in their recovery arising from PTSD. This legislation will exempt peace officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel in Ohio from the requirement that claimants diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder must have suffered an accompanying physical injury in order to apply for compensation with the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation.

Currently, R.C. Sec. 4123.01(C)(1) requires that a claimant diagnosed with a psychiatric condition must have sustained a physical injury precipitating their mental condition to be eligible for workers' compensation. However, experts agree that no scientific evidence exists proving a person has to have a physical injury to be diagnosed with a psychiatric condition. This legislation would assure that first responders diagnosed with PTSD arising from their employment are eligible for covered treatment and compensation, regardless of physical injury.

Ohio's hard-working and dedicated first responders are often subject to scenes of violence, high stress and hazardous situations that can cause lasting psychiatric damage, even in instances where a physical injury was not sustained. This legislation will provide avenues of relief for peace officers and firefighters who have valiantly served the public and suffer from PTSD originating from the performance of their duties. This commonsense change gives our brave men and women time to recover and help them begin the journey back to work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



STATE SENATOR
EDNA BROWN

11TH DISTRICT

Sponsor Testimony
Senator Edna Brown
Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee
November 14, 2017

Chairman Hottinger, Vice Chair Hackett, and fellow members of the Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee, thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 118 today. This bill would enable peace officers, firefighters, and emergency medical workers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) arising from employment without an accompanying physical injury to be eligible for compensation and benefits under Ohio Workers' Compensation Law.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur after an individual experiences a traumatic or life-threatening event. While PTSD can happen to anyone, the percentage of people diagnosed with the disorder tends to be especially high among veterans and first-responders due to the nature of their work. PTSD can severely interfere with an individual's wellbeing, potentially leading to substance abuse, alcohol addiction, depression, anxiety, and difficulty sleeping. If left untreated, the condition can worsen.

As this legislation is considered, I want to emphasize several things.

First, the issue of PTSD impacts first responders in all of our districts. We rely on these people every day to protect and save the lives of others; they willingly put aside their own safety to secure ours. We owe them the ability to receive the proper treatment and care that they need.

Secondly, I think it's important to highlight that we are not talking about people permanently leaving the workforce after receiving BWC benefits. Under this bill, a

person would be eligible for compensation and benefits for up to one year. Additionally, they would be prohibited from receiving a disability benefit from a state retirement system for PTSD during the time period in which the person is receiving compensation under the Workers' Compensation Law.

Our goal is to give first responders the resources they need to deal with PTSD quickly and effectively when the symptoms first appear. By providing treatment right away, we can help these brave men and women heal and continue serving their communities.

This is a bipartisan issue, and I'm grateful that Senator LaRose is joining me as a primary sponsor of this important legislation. I urge my colleagues to recognize all of the good this bill does for an invaluable group of people.

Thank you and I will be happy to join Senator LaRose in answering any questions.