

Good Morning Co Chairs Wood and Winther, the Board and Ms VanWinkle

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 SB 507HB 2418. We are approximately 15,000 Police Officers, Career Paid Fire Fighters, Corrections Officers and Dispatchers throughout the entire State of Oregon.

My colleague Nelson Hall will speak to the amendments we are proposing, I am going to speak to the issue in front of this committee.

In the course of our careers these covered employees face unimaginable exposure to the worse life has to offer. The data tells us the 90% of the general public will experience one exposure to a traumatic event and the most common number of uniquely traumatic events over a lifetime is three. Our IAFF data tells us that a fire fighter can experience the normal lifetime of traumatic events in one 24 hour shift. A normal career in public safety is approaching 30 years. A seasoned public safety officer could have over 100 traumatic events in a career.

We need to acknowledge the workplace exposure to sentinel events such as the Thurston High School shooting, Umpqua Community College shooting where the son of one of our fire fighters was shot and killed, the Clackamas Town Center Shooting, the California deployment to the Camp Fire, which scorched the earth and left 88 people dead, the recent Barlow Hostage situation in Clackamas County and the Eugene Springfield Fire's Ambush Fire where each of the five fire fighters were struck by shotgun pellets and if not for their fire protective gear we would be discussing the loss of life of five firefighters. Oregon unfortunately is not immune to these sentinel events and with the increase in call volume, the loss or maintenance of current public safety workforce has led to more exposures per employee and the need for this presumption.

As Oregon's population continues to grow, the need for public safety officers will increase, unfortunately political and financial forces beyond our needs are in play, with 140 people on average moving into Oregon every day, or to put it in to perspective we are adding in excess a city the size of Lake Oswego each year to Oregon's population. Can we say proportionally the same is occurring in the public safety space? Older populations and violent crime are increasing, EMS call volumes are experiencing double digit increases and for the fifth year in a row some larger communities in Oregon are experiencing a 20% increase in requests for service. Same number of dispatchers, same number of firefighters, and Law Enforcement officers means more calls leads to more exposure and therefore increased opportunity for workplace traumas. Cumulative Stress is real.

The question is both a literal and moral one, does being a dispatcher, Corrections officer, police officer or fire fire fighter mean employers have a responsibility in taking care of of these employees when exposed to the rigors of the job? 14 other states have said yes.

We have heard arguments against a presumption based on slippery slope, why just public safety? People see terrible things in every workplace. our assertion is our exposures are dramatically different, we are the hands on the patient, we are the fixers of the incident, our involvement is more than witnessing an incident, we are the end resource and are there to stabilize it or make it better. Whether a prison riot, taking information to begin the chain of survival, stopping the consequence of fire, breathe for those who are not, break up domestic violence or take control of a hostage situation. With alarming regularity we are experiencing life's most difficult moments with fewer resources and sentinel events that were never conceived of when Mahonia Hall reforms were enacted.

The increased access to vetted, competent mental health providers, expanded EAP, peer support training, evidence based behavioral health are pieces of the solution. With competent providers the diagnosis of work related exposures is being made easier. Some have commented on not wanting to pay for others responsibilities, this improvement or narrowing of causation for public safety workers is a promising development . Overcoming the culture of weakness, understanding of the problem of traumatic exposure, which in turn leads to substance abuse, family disfunction, and increased risk of suicide is the responsibility of us all, policy makers, managers, workers and the public. This presumption is for the employees who answer the call every single day, this bill is the final piece of the solution.

This is a real problem that needs comprehensive Workers Compensation coverage. Employers must take responsibility for time loss, treatment and job protection just like any other on the job injury

This year alone there are over 250 bills in the Oregon Legislature dealing with mental illness While some may or may not get a hearing, we must do our part to protect those who protect us all with this presumption.

The Coalition of Public Safety Employees urge your support of amended Senate Bill 507/HB 2418

Thank you I will turn it over to Nelson Hall