



COSUMNES FIRE DEPARTMENT

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July 23, 2019

To: The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez, Chair Assembly Appropriations Committee State Capitol Building Sacramento, CA 95814

From: Cosumnes CSD Fire Department

RE: SB 542 (Stern) – The Trauma Treatment Act. **(SUPPORT)**

Dear Assembly member Gonzalez:

On behalf of the Cosumnes Fire Department, I write to express our strong support for SB 542, which has been referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee for consideration after having been *unanimously* approved by the Assembly Insurance Committee. ***We respectfully request your “AYE” vote on this bill when it comes before you.***

As firefighters, the nature, frequency, and unpredictability of our work environment can take an overwhelming toll – both physically and emotionally. Research shows that our chronic exposure to traumatic events and critical incidents increases our risk for post-traumatic stress and other stress-induced symptoms.

It's suggested that between 7% and 11% of firefighters suffer from clinical levels of depressive symptoms. The rate of post-traumatic stress in fire service personnel who have responded to human disasters is 17%, and the rate of depression is even higher at 22%. The rate of acute stress disorder after exposure to disasters is 26%.

According to the International Association of Fire Fighters, research further suggests that repeated exposure to trauma appears to increase risk for the development of certain mental health disorders. For example, firefighters who have previous disaster experience are seven times more likely to develop PTSD with further disaster response. It's estimated that 20% of fire service members currently suffer from PTSD, compared to 8% among all adults. And, sadly, the fire service is four times more likely to experience a suicide than a “traditional” line-of-duty death in any given year. In 2017, more firefighters committed suicide than died in traumatic job-caused incidents. In 2016, one estimate puts the number of firefighter suicides at 99.

For decades, California has provided rebuttable workers' compensation protections to public safety officers, including firefighters, who contract specific illnesses or sustain certain injuries in the course of doing our job. However, the law does not currently extend such protections in instances where a firefighter sustains a post-traumatic stress injury (PTSI) resulting from the occupational horrors we incur on a regular basis in our sworn mission to protect lives and property.

SB 542 helps facilitate timely treatment for a firefighter who is suffering with a PTSI. This bill enables a quick recovery and return to work. It also helps raise awareness about these kinds of job-caused injuries, while destigmatizing the condition for those who seek treatment for their illness. For these reasons, **we urge your support for this important bill.**

Sincerely,



Michael W. McLaughlin
Fire Chief
Cosumnes Fire Department