



Sanford Police Department

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To: Joint Labor and Housing Committee

Ref: LD1123 An Act to Create a Presumption
that a Cardiovascular Injury or Pulmonary
Disease Suffered by Certain Law Enforcement
Officers in the Course of Employment.

Date: April 6, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Eric Small, I am one of approximately 2800 Law Enforcement Officers serving our great State. I currently serve as the Deputy Chief at the Sanford Police Department. On August 19, 2022, I went into cardiac arrest in McPherson, Kansas while moving my son into his dorm room.

But this isn't where my story starts, it's where it almost ended. It starts in 1993 where I took my first job as a summer officer at the Ogunquit Police Department. Summers after that I would work in York, and served as a reserve officer in Berwick until I was hired as a full-time officer on August 19, 2001. That's right, I died on the 21st anniversary to my date of hire. You heard me correctly, I died!

When I regained consciousness, I was in Hutchinson, Kansas, a half hour from my son's college. The doctor told me I was down for 20 minutes, flat lining in the care of two paramedics, who conducted CPR and defibrillated me twice. Nurses said "Eric, you died twice and they brought you back," and the doctor told me I had a 1% chance of survival.

I immediately thought of my wife and children. I was in rough shape. In between getting sick, I called my son, downplaying the seriousness of my condition so he could enjoy his first few days of college life. I didn't call my 13-year-old daughter, as I knew she would worry. I called my wife, who I learned was on her way to the airport to be by my side. In this moment I realized how quickly everything can be taken away.

By all accounts I'm in pretty good shape for a 50-year-old man. I don't smoke and rarely drink alcohol, and I exercise. Just a few months earlier I summited Mt. Katahdin. But what I didn't do well for the past 20 years was self-care. It was not in my vocabular when I began my law enforcement journey, but now my profession stresses self-care. We check on the health of our officers. We have Crisis Intervention Stress Management Teams to work with officers after critical incidents. We recognize Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome in our profession. We are trying to remove the stigma associated with asking for help.

Unfortunately, for 95% of my career this wasn't the case. I still remember three-year-old Madison who drowned in a pool many years ago, traumatic car crashes, too many to count, and overwhelmingly sad death notifications, one as recent as a month ago. The long-term activation of the stress response system, and the overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones disrupts almost all of the body's processes which puts officers at increased risk of heart disease.

Don't get me wrong. I am not complaining, none of us do. We signed up for all of it, and I wouldn't give any of it back. Because with all the hard stuff comes good things, too. I'm a member of a law enforcement fraternity. We help people. We are there for people on the hardest day of their lives. We take on their pain, to make it just a little bit easier for them. That's our job.

Back to the 2800 Maine Law Enforcement Officers that I spoke of at the beginning. They're strong, professional, and ethical. They're not on the news for gross human rights violations, and you don't see Maine officers being prosecuted for heinous crimes. Rather, they're protecting the Constitution they took an oath to uphold. Often at the expense of their own health.

Maine Law Enforcement Officers should have the protection of LD1123 and as a survivor, I ask you to support this bill. I would be happy to take any questions.

Respectfully,

Eric H. Small