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"In Valor There Is Hope"

Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing Hearing Testimony
By Paul Gaspar, Executive Director; Maine Association of Police

LD 467: "An Act to Support E-9-1-1 Dispatchers and Corrections Officers Diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder"

Monday March 1st, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee on Labor and Housing; my name is Paul Gaspar and I am from South Portland. As the Executive Director of the Maine Association of Police, I would like to take this opportunity to offer comments on behalf of our board and membership in support of LD 467 as titled above.

LD 467 represents a common sense addition of public safety dispatchers and corrections officers in accessing PTSD relief through rebuttable presumption under the Workers' Compensation Act. Currently accessible by those in law enforcement and the fire/EMS service, this bill would allow our fellow first responders to serve their communities with the knowledge that they will have support and relief should they succumb to the daily and cumulative exposure to the shared trauma experienced by serving those in crisis.

It is important to underscore that although law enforcement, fire, and EMS employees are easily recognized as our front line responders, it is equally important to recognize our dispatchers and corrections officers as a key link in the public safety chain as our first line responders.

Although there has been a recognized advancement in the understanding first responder Post Traumatic Stress Disease, it is clear that we have a continuing obligation to learn and adapt to how PTSD is diagnosed, treated and the affected employee(s) supported.

Time and action is critical as our first responders are increasingly lost to suicide then other work related illnesses or injuries. We know that prolonged exposure to stress and trauma whether it is physical or by proxy as experienced by dispatchers, has a cumulative and discernible effect both physically and emotionally over the course of an individual's career; the onset of which could take years to manifest itself, or come full on by the mere presence of a sight, smell or sound.

This was the case when this presumption was first promulgated by law. Since then, first responders have been subjected to stress and trauma in the wake of a pandemic that has exacerbated this tenfold. Not only in the exposure to the illness and toll to families in their professional lives, but also from the fear, anxiety and loss in their own. I urge you to include all our public safety responders in this absolutely necessary protection under workers compensation and fully hope that this support will not be allowed to stop when this critical protection fall victim to its sunset provision on October 1st, 2022. Thank you.

Website: www.maineassociationofpolice.com