



Text File

Introduced: 3/10/2020

Bill No: 2020-0207, **Version:** 1

Committee: City Council

Status: Adopted

WHEREAS, Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) is a post-traumatic stress disorder characterized by exposure to a traumatic event as identified by the American Psychiatric Association and documented in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition; and

WHEREAS, a 2018 study published by the Ruderman Family Foundation titled “Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders” noted that “constant exposure to death and destruction exerts a toll on the mental health of first responders, and yet many do not disclose mental health issues nor do they access treatment;” and

WHEREAS, that same study concluded the following: “First responders experience trauma as a regular part of their job. Perhaps not surprisingly, when compared to members of the civilian population, they experience heightened levels of depression, PTSD, suicidal thoughts, and more. First responders are more likely to die by suicide than to die within the line of duty. There is hardly any media attention devoted to this issue, contributing to a pervasive silence, shame, and stigma. These factors make it more difficult for first responders to access potentially life-saving mental health services;” and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania House Bill No. 432 of 2019 (H.B. 432) would amend the Pennsylvania Workers’ Compensation Law so as to include PTSI as an “occupational disease” that may arise as a result of a professional and volunteer firefighter, volunteer ambulance corps personnel, volunteer rescue and lifesaving squad personnel, emergency medical services personnel and paramedics, telecommunicator, corrections officer, or a Pennsylvania State Police officer’s service; and

WHEREAS, if enacted, H.B. 432’s provisions would entitle those first responders to benefits under the Pennsylvania Workers’ Compensation Law for the psychological trauma suffered in the line of duty or after four years or more of service, irrespective of whether or not a first responder also suffers a physical injury; and

WHEREAS, as the law currently stands, the stipulation that one must suffer a trauma-inducing experience under an “abnormal working condition” to claim workers’ compensation benefits creates a substantial hurdle that prevents countless first responders from receiving necessary and appropriate psychiatric care because their service requires frequent exposure to such trauma-inducing experiences; and

WHEREAS, H.B. 432 would eliminate a situation in which first responders are forced to choose between seeking quality treatment or forgoing their wages and suffering financial consequences just for seeking medical care; and

WHEREAS, according to the Ruderman Family Foundation study, “when compared to members of the civilian population, [first responders] experience heightened levels of depression, [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder], suicidal thoughts, and more” because their exposure to trauma is an, unfortunately, all too common part of the

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course of their service; and

WHEREAS, because of this, first responders are more likely to die by suicide than they are to die as part of their service in the line of duty, but shame, stigma, and other barriers can keep first responders from pursuing the mental health services that they need, and these first responders should be encouraged to do so and supported so that they can receive necessary and possibly life-saving treatment; and

WHEREAS, barriers to mental health treatment for first responders should be taken down, and H.B. 432 is a critical first step.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh makes known its support for Pennsylvania House Bill No. 432 of 2019 and encourages its swift adoption by the Pennsylvania General Assembly; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Council encourages the Allegheny Delegation of both chambers of the General Assembly to support this vital legislation, as well as any companion legislation to it that may be introduced.