



Kansas Bureau of Investigation

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Testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee
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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Angie Jones and I serve as the Wellness Coordinator of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) and the President of the First Responder Support Team for the Midwest. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of SB 491 this morning. SB 491 would allow first responders who are diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to utilize workman's compensation to receive treatment for the diagnosis.

According to the American Psychiatry Association (APA), PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event. A diagnosis of PTSD requires exposure to an upsetting traumatic event. People with PTSD have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended. They may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares; they may feel sadness, fear or anger; and they may feel detached or estranged from other people. People with PTSD may avoid situations or people that remind them of the traumatic event, and they may have strong negative reactions to something as ordinary as a loud noise or an accidental touch.¹

Some symptoms of PTSD include but are not limited to: involuntary memories, distressing dreams, flashbacks, avoidance, distorted thoughts, ongoing fear, anger, guilt, detachment, and reckless or self-destructive behavior. *For a person to be diagnosed with PTSD, however, symptoms must last for more than a month and must cause significant distress or problems in the individual's daily functioning.* Many individuals develop symptoms within three months of the trauma, but symptoms may appear later and often persist for months and sometimes years. PTSD often occurs with other related conditions, such as depression, substance use, memory problems and other physical and mental health problems.²

The average individual will experience one traumatic event during their lifetime that could lead to a diagnosis of PTSD. About 6 out of every 100 people or 6% of the population will have PTSD at some point in their lives³. However, police officers are particularly vulnerable; facing an average of three traumatic experiences for every sixth months of service⁴.

¹ [What Is PTSD? \(psychiatry.org\)](https://www.psychiatry.org)

² Ibid

³ [How Common is PTSD in Adults? - PTSD: National Center for PTSD \(va.gov\)](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/how-common-is-ptsd-in-adults/)

⁴ [Study pinpoints five most likely causes of post-traumatic stress in police officers -- ScienceDaily](https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/healthcare/2018/05/study-pinpoints-five-most-likely-causes-of-post-traumatic-stress-in-police-officers-1805180011.htm)

First responders are exposed to traumatic events much more frequently than the general population. Some examples of the types of traumatic events experienced by first responders include, but are not limited to: traffic fatalities and injuries, death investigations, sexual and physical abuse of children, and use of force incidents, in which the officer fears for his or her life. Long term exposure to these types of events, although not a physical injury, could be considered a mental injury. Studies show that the part of the brain that handles fear and emotion, the amygdala, is more active in people with PTSD.

The potential long term effects of PTSD in police officers may additionally lead to behavior dysfunction such as substance abuse, aggression, and suicide. A white paper commissioned by the [Ruderman] Foundation has revealed that first responders (policemen and firefighters) are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty. Suicide is a result of mental illness, including depression and PTSD, which stems from constant exposure to death and destruction.

One study included in the white paper found that on average, police officers witness 188 ‘critical incidents’ during their careers. This exposure to trauma can lead to several forms of mental illness. For example, PTSD and depression rates among firefighters and police officers have been found to be as much as 5 times higher than the rates within the civilian population, which causes these first responders to commit suicide at a considerably higher rate (firefighters: 18/100,000; police officers: 17/100,000; general population 13/100,000). Even when suicide does not occur, untreated mental illness can lead to poor physical health and impaired decision-making⁵.

Most studies on PTSD in law enforcement estimate that 15-20% of law enforcement officers suffer from diagnosable PTSD. Unfortunately, the real impact is unknown because police officers often fear admitting these symptoms or seeking help.

Because our first responders are at a higher risk of developing a PTSD diagnosis, several proactive and reactive measures have been put in place in an effort to help minimize the reactions and symptoms of officers following a traumatic event. The first responder community has recognized that broadening the education to law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services personnel is critical. Efforts to include education on mental health, how the brain and body work following a critical incident, and how to best care for themselves following an exposure to a traumatic event.

A peer support network has been developed in the State of Kansas to assist first responders who are involved in critical events. Many individual first responder agencies have established their own peer support team. Additionally, there is a state-wide program available to all first responder agencies. Group and individual “critical incident de-briefs” following a critical event is another important step to mitigating long term PTSD in first responders.

Even with proactive and reactive mental health intervention and support, a number of first responders will develop symptoms of PTSD. Some individuals will reach out and seek help, work hard, and successfully manage their diagnosis. Unfortunately, others who do reach out for help will still experience significant distress in their daily lives thus creating an environment in which they can no longer perform their job at the safe and productive level, which is required.

⁵ [Study: Police Officers and Firefighters Are More Likely to Die by Suicide than in Line of Duty - Ruderman Family Foundation \(rudermanfoundation.org\)](http://rudermanfoundation.org)

Currently, Kansas is one of only 11 states that do not cover mental health/PTSD through workman's compensation. In 2021, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and West Virginia passed legislation related to PTSD as a covered benefit. Similar legislation has recently been introduced in California, Oklahoma, and New York⁶.

KBI Special Agents, investigate violent crimes to include homicide, sexual assault, battery, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Additionally, the KBI has a Child Victims Unit (CVU), the Northeast Child Victim Task Force (NECVTF), and a Digital Forensics Unit which investigate sexual abuse of children to include Jessica Law and child pornography cases. Furthermore, the KBI Crime Scene Response Team (CSRT) responds to requests for assistance with crime scene investigation of major violent crimes across the state. Unfortunately, witnessing the abhorrent side of society day in and day out over a 20+ year career can have a cumulative effect on an individual.

First responder agencies have recognized the need to proactively address the reactions and symptoms that come with exposure to critical events. However, efforts such as critical incident stress debriefs and peer support programs only provide a stop gap solution to minimize the effects of exposure to trauma. In some cases, professional counseling and medication is necessary to treat and improve symptoms of PTSD. **Because these symptoms are directly correlated to the disturbing and traumatizing work of first responders, it is appropriate for PTSD to be covered under workman's compensation.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding this important and critical step towards the improved health of our first responders. The KBI urges the committee to pass SB 491 favorably.

⁶ [PTSD Coverage \(optum.com\)](https://www.optum.com)