



Kansas State Lodge

Fraternal Order of Police

Testimony to the
Senate Committee on Commerce
Senate Bill 491

Scott Kirkpatrick, President, Kansas City, Kansas Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #4
Testifying in Support
February 21, 2022

Chairperson Erickson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Scott Kirkpatrick and I have been a police officer in Kansas City, Kansas, and Bonner Springs for over a combined 21 years. I am a member of the Fraternal Order of Police and serve as a local lodge President. I also work as a PEER Support Team Member which responds to Critical Incidents involving Officers and provides mental health resources to effected first responders. I testify today on behalf of the more than 4,200 law enforcement officers who are members of the Kansas State Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police.

SB 491 intends to provide much needed mental health benefits to first responders who are experiencing mental health issues related to their jobs. Currently under the Kansas Workers Compensation Act, first responders who are experiencing mental health issues that are job related, are not covered by workers compensation unless the incident that caused the mental health issue was related to a corresponding physical injury. For example, if an officer is involved in a shooting with an armed suspect, and he or she was shot or physically injured during the incident, any mental health issue that derives from the shooting such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) would be covered. However, officers who were not physically injured but experienced the same PTSD, would not be covered under workers' compensation. SB 491 addresses this issue and provides that an officer will be eligible for benefits for work related mental illness that is directly related to a work incident.

This is a very important and much needed change as we in law enforcement continue to battle mental health issues that are at epidemic levels. All too often, officers do not seek early treatment for PTSD and other mental illnesses because they are concerned about the effect disclosing such issues will have on their careers. These issues if disclosed or identified early can be successfully treated. However, the longer that these issues continue to fester, the more difficult they are to treat. In many cases, had the issues been addressed early, the officers would have received treatment and could have continued to work while doing so. Without early intervention, the condition and the problems associated with it continue to worsen and often result in the officer being unable to work or return to work, which forces many highly qualified officers into early retirement. At a time when the recruitment of law enforcement officers has become more difficult than ever, we must be given the tools to retain those currently serving their community.

We also face a serious and continuing battle with first responder suicides. Over the past three years an average of 188 officers have committed suicide. This problem must be addressed, and we believe that the passage of SB 491 will give us another tool in the mental health battle.

Thank you holding a hearing on this very important issue. I am pleased to answer any questions at the appropriate time.