

Wisconsin EMS Association

Serving Those Who Serve Others



To: Senator Patrick Testin, Chair
Representative William Penterman
Members, Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans & Military Affairs
Members, Assembly Committee on Labor & Integrated Employment

From: Alan DeYoung, Executive Director

Date: Thursday, February 8, 2024

Re: Support SB-992 \ LRB-5952: Request PTSD Coverage for all EMS & Fire Personnel

On behalf of the Wisconsin EMS Association (WEMSA) we are asking the Committees to please support extending to all emergency medical services (EMS) practitioners and firefighters the same worker's compensation coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the same manner as law enforcement officers and full-time fire fighters.

The Wisconsin EMS Association membership consists of over 7,000 EMS providers and more than 350 EMS departments.

While 2021 Act 29 provided coverage to some, it did not include stand-alone EMS Services or volunteer firefighters or EMS. During the 2021-22 session PTSD worker's compensation coverage legislation was introduced: SB-680\AB-683 that provided changes to include paid emergency medical services practitioners; and SB-681\AB-778 that proposed changes to include various professions including all EMS practitioners and firefighters, including volunteers. And, while they passed a senate committee (5-0) and the state senate (32-0) unanimously - they passed too late in the session to receive final action. It should be noted that a similar proposal was included in the originally proposed 2023-2025 biennial state budget.

78.6% of EMS departments rely on volunteers to serve their community. These men and women donate their time or may be paid a minimal stipend to provide the same emergency care as their EMS-firefighter affiliated contemporaries.

Please note that volunteer EMS services also pay worker's compensation insurance. And like our full-time law enforcement, firefighter, and firefighter-EMS colleagues – stand-alone services experience the same work-related challenges and risks serving in their emergency responder capacity. In fact, studies of emergency medical providers / ambulance personnel have shown higher estimated rates of PTSD prevalence.

Simply put – it's about fairness. It's about recognizing that all EMS providers are essential first responders that face similar experiences and work-related hardships, regardless if they are associated with a municipal, private-sector based EMS service or administrated with the fire department.

Other Statistics...

- A study conducted using in-hospital and prehospital providers found that “prehospital providers were significantly more likely to screen positive for PTSD compared to the in-hospital providers (42% vs. 21%, P<0.001).”¹
- From a study published in the Journal of Emergency Medical Services researchers found that first responders (EMS) in the United States were approximately 10 times more likely to have suicidal ideations and/or attempt suicide compared to the CDC national average.
- Studies show that first responders are at an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and additional mental health issues including substance abuse. These studies compared police, firefighters, and first responders in each study.²
- Depression and PTSD affect an estimated 30% of our nation’s first responders – compared to 20% of the general population. ³
- Approximately 3.7% of Americans have contemplated suicide, that rate jumps to 37% for fire and EMS professionals - same thing as above but different wording.⁴

Again, on behalf of the Wisconsin EMS Association membership we request that all EMS services and their EMS staff be afforded the same conditions of worker's compensation benefits for EMS who are diagnosed with PTSD. Wisconsin law has already extended such provisions for full-time emergency medical providers that serve on EMS services affiliated with a fire department – along with law enforcement and fire.

Thank you,

Alan DeYoung, M.S.
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¹ Reference: [Journal of EMS: First Responders and PTSD: A Literature Review](#)

² Reference: [Journal of EMS: First Responders and PTSD: A Literature Review](#)

³ Reference: [America’s first responders’ struggle with PTSD and depression](#)

⁴ Reference: [America’s first responders’ struggle with PTSD and depression](#)