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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB406: Workers' Compensation - Occupational Disease Presumptions - First Responders
Senate Finance Committee
Tuesday, February 21, 2023 1PM

“9-1-1-- What is the location of your emergency?”

Imagine answering the phone to hear a desperate parent whose child is not breathing. After you hang up, the next call is from an injured driver involved in a ten-car pile-up. Once emergency personnel reach the scene, you take a breath, only to pick up the phone and hear from a woman who had just been raped. A 9-1-1 Specialist’s daily job is demanding, harrowing, and essential to public health and safety. The courageous women and men under the headsets are surely our **“First, First Responders.”**

[The National Emergency Numbers Association reported](#) that “There is a staffing crisis in 9-1-1. Public Safety Answering Points [9-1-1 Centers] across the nation are chronically understaffed, leading to a workforce that is continually stressed, overworked, and burned out. New hires and trainees are frequently gone before their probationary periods end.”

Research suggests that [8-24% of 9-1-1 Specialists experience PTSD](#) (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) when psychologically evaluated, and [23.9% exhibited symptoms of probable major depression](#). The effects of trauma will only worsen as Maryland continues its transition to Next Generation 9-1-1, when they will be exposed to gruesome photos and videos as well. These audible and/or visual experiences leave 9-1-1 Specialists even more vulnerable to psychological trauma.

The trauma associated with answering 9-1-1 calls is not hypothetical and cannot be overstated. In recent years, these First First Responders have died by suicide or had significant emotional breakdowns. That includes incidents here in Maryland.

But our 9-1-1 Specialists are not alone in facing significant trauma due to their life-saving public service jobs. Unlike last year’s version, SB406 proposes to include:

- A FIREFIGHTER;
- AN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PROVIDER;
- A RESCUE SQUAD MEMBER;
- A SWORN MEMBER OF THE OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL;
- A MEMBER OF A VOLUNTEER FIRE OR RESCUE COMPANY;
- A 9–1–1 SPECIALIST;
- A LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER; OR
- A CORRECTIONAL OFFICER.

[SB406](#) would establish a Workers' Compensation presumption for First Responders who suffer from clinically diagnosed, work-related PTSD. This would shift the burden of proving the diagnosis from the suffering First Responders.

The eligibility for this presumption is specific and narrow. A First Responder seeking compensation must be examined and diagnosed by a psychologist or psychiatrist licensed to practice in the jurisdiction where the First Responder would be treated. Mental health conditions **must** meet the criteria specified in the [American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders](#) to qualify. Individuals must apply while employed as a First Responder or within 18 months immediately following employment.

On behalf of the NG911 Commission, and with respect and gratitude to our dedicated, tenacious, and courageous public servants who save lives every day, **I implore you to give SB406 a favorable report.**