



**February 26, 2025**

C.T. Wilson, Chair  
House Economic Matters Committee  
230 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Position: FAVORABLE**

HB217 - Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – Hypertension

The Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland represents more than 10,000 active and retired professional fire fighters and emergency medical services personnel who proudly serve the citizens of the State of Maryland.

We are in strong support of the proposed clarification regarding the definition of disablement for workers' compensation presumption coverage for hypertension. This amendment provides much-needed clarity and fairness for individuals who dedicate their lives to public service, particularly those in high-risk professions such as firefighting and emergency response. This clarification reinforces the original intent of the workers' compensation presumption coverage for hypertension that was first enacted in 1971.

The proposed change ensures that disablement under § 9-502 is clearly defined by incorporating well-established medical criteria for hypertension as outlined in the 2022 edition of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1582 Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments. Specifically, an individual would be deemed to have satisfied the requirements for disablement if:

1. Their blood pressure readings exceed 140 mm Hg systolic or 90 mm Hg diastolic, as required for a finding of hypertension under NFPA 1582.
2. They have been required to use prescribed medication to treat hypertension for at least 90 consecutive days.

This clarification is critical for several reasons. First, it aligns the workers' compensation presumption coverage with current medical standards, ensuring that individuals who experience significant hypertension-related health risks receive the support they deserve. Firefighters and emergency responders are routinely exposed to extreme physical and psychological stress, which has been scientifically linked to an increased risk of hypertension. Given the cumulative toll this takes on their health, it is imperative that we provide them with a clearly defined pathway to obtain the benefits they have rightfully earned.

Furthermore, by explicitly defining disablement criteria, this amendment reduces ambiguity in workers' compensation claims, fostering a fairer and more efficient adjudication process. Currently, the absence of a specific standard may lead to inconsistent rulings, prolonging the process and imposing unnecessary burdens on affected individuals. Implementing the NFPA 1582 guidelines ensures that claims are evaluated based on objective medical criteria rather than subjective interpretations.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the committee to support this much-needed clarification. Our firefighters and emergency responders face extraordinary challenges every day in service to our communities. By passing this important legislation, it will affirm the commitment to firefighters' health, safety, and well-being, ensuring they receive the coverage they deserve under workers' compensation law.

Submitted respectfully,



Jeffrey Buddle, President  
Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland

*The membership of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland includes 25 IAFF local affiliates from the following jurisdictions:*

*Federal: Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Fort George G. Meade, National Capital Federal Fire Fighters*

*State: Baltimore / Washington International Airport*

*Local: Annapolis City, Allegany County, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City (2 affiliates), Baltimore County, Carroll County, Cecil County, Charles County, Cumberland City, Frederick County, Garrett County, Hagerstown, Howard County, Montgomery County, Ocean City, Prince Georges County, Queen Annes County, Salisbury, Talbot County, Worchester County*