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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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April 27, 2021
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GOVERNOR SIGNS SEN. JACQUE'S BILL PROTECTING PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH

Measure gives first responders PTSD coverage under worker's compensation

MADISON...Help for the heroes who protect our communities is on the way after Gov. Evers today signed the "Public Safety PTSD Coverage Act" at Fire Station 14, just miles away from the State Capitol.

State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere), who authored the bi-partisan measure, said increasing suicide rates for first responders suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are now outpacing on-duty deaths.

"PTSD can be treated effectively and allow those affected to return to protecting and serving the public," Sen. Jacque said. "It is critical that the men and women we depend on as first responders who are affected by PTSD have access to this treatment."

Law enforcement and firefighters are routinely subjected to catastrophic incidents involving severe injury and death at a rate much greater than the general workforce. Unfortunately, they are unable to receive coverage under Wisconsin's current workers compensation law due to a 1974 Wisconsin Supreme Court Case that requires "a situation of greater dimensions" than experienced by those within the same profession- essentially punishing them for choosing an occupation where they must routinely rush toward, rather than away from, danger. This bill eliminates the "greater dimensions" requirement for these professions, and recognizes that while a single event can trigger PTSD, so can repeated everyday exposure to dangerous high stress events.

"The day-to-day situations faced by public safety first responders, by the very nature of their job, involve death, danger and violence with great frequency," Sen. Jacque said. "They are much more likely to experience PTSD from singular or cumulative events and suffer greatly as a result. Helping public safety employees with the treatment needed to recover from PTSD and return to work also reduces the long term costs of duty disability and training of new personnel," Sen. Jacque said.

Sen. Jacque thanked his Assembly lead author, Rep. Cody Horlacher, and the long list of bi-partisan co-sponsors supporting the legislation, along with the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association, Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association, and the Badger State Sheriffs' Association, as well as Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC) and the AFL-CIO, for supporting the Public Safety PTSD Coverage Act. He also expressed appreciation for the members of the Worker's Compensation Advisory Council and its Labor and Management Caucuses for their support in development of the reforms.

"There has been a general, bi-partisan consensus for a while now that something needs to be done to aid and retain our first responders," Sen. Jacque said. "This is a monumentally impactful and lifesaving first step among many that we need to take to address mental health."

The Governor signed the Public Safety PTSD Coverage Act ([Senate Bill 11](#)) into law as Act 29.

Senator André Jacque represents Northeast Wisconsin's First Senate District, consisting of Door and Kewaunee Counties and portions of Brown, Calumet, Manitowoc, and Outagamie counties.

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