

Wisconsin AFL-CIO: Last Minute, unannounced amendment in COVID-19 bill by Wisconsin Republicans leaves frontline workers exposed and ineligible for Worker's Compensation

Posted on Friday, Apr 24, 2020

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April 24, 2020, MILWAUKEE, WI – The following is a statement from Wisconsin AFL-CIO President Stephanie Bloomingdale, co-chair of Wisconsin's Worker's Compensation Advisory Council:

“The Wisconsin State Assembly and Senate recently voted on a Public Health Emergency bill addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill originally included a provision from Governor Evers that said all essential workers who contract the virus are presumed to have been infected on the job, making them eligible for worker's compensation. During the session, Speaker Robin Vos emerged from a backroom meeting with a lobbyist from the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) and abruptly inserted an amendment that effectively eliminated this presumption, leaving our frontline workers unprotected.

This means frontline health care workers, first responders like firefighters, police and EMTs, and other essential workers who risk their lives every day to keep our

communities safe and healthy during the COVID-19 crisis have to meet an impossibly high burden of proof to get the worker's compensation they deserve. How, for example, can the firefighter who is diagnosed with COVID-19 identify exactly which person infected him among all those he assisted in an emergency?

Moreover, changes related to state's worker's compensation system are supposed to go through the democratic and respected Worker's Compensation Advisory Council process which allows for input from employers, unions, health care groups, insurance companies and all stakeholders. This brazen Republican end run around that process has, unfortunately, become all too familiar.

The Wisconsin AFL-CIO calls upon the legislature and Governor Evers to fully restore the coronavirus presumption provision that makes it possible for frontline workers who are infected while bravely keeping our state running to immediately get the worker compensation they deserve. To put corporate financial interests above the health and safety of our frontline heroes is a shocking betrayal that must not stand."