

Sen. Jacque: Bill to extend mental healthcare to more first responders clears Senate

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MADISON... Communities could protect more of the heroes who protect them under two pieces of legislation passed by the State Senate today that expand eligibility for mental health coverage under the “Public Safety PTSD Coverage Act” that became law last April.

State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere), co-author of the measures, said they expand upon [2021 Act 29](#), which he introduced to address a growing post-traumatic stress crisis among our first responder community that has continued to escalate, with more members of law enforcement and other first responders lost to suicide than to line-of-duty deaths.

“These initiatives build upon the bi-partisan work of the last few sessions that lead to the successful passage and signing into law of Act 29,” Sen. Jacque said. “In addition to police and fire fighters, we would also provide Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) coverage under worker’s compensation to our emergency medical service practitioners, dispatchers, correction officers, medical examiners, coroners and volunteer fire fighters.”

Sen. Jacque said first responders are routinely subjected to catastrophic incidents involving severe injury and death, and suffer PTSD and suicide, at a rate much greater than the general workforce. Unfortunately, they were unable to receive coverage under Wisconsin’s prior worker’s compensation law due to a 1974 Wisconsin Supreme Court Case that required “a situation of greater dimensions”

than experienced by those within the same profession. While Act 29 eliminated the “greater dimensions” requirement for police and fire fighters, this new legislation extends that same eligibility to other first responders.

“State law needs to recognize that while a single event can trigger PTSD, so can repeated everyday exposure to dangerous high stress events,” Sen. Jacque said. “It makes no sense to essentially punish someone for choosing an occupation where they must routinely rush toward, rather than away from, danger.”

Sen. Jacque said PTSD can be treated effectively and allow those affected to return to protecting and serving the public.

“It is critical that the men and women we have depended on as first responders that are affected by PTSD have access to treatment and the support they need to recover, both for their own health and the benefit of the communities they serve,” Sen. Jacque said. “Now that this option for treatment is open for some, we have more work ahead to truly address the needs of more first responders.”

Both [Senate Bill 680](#) and [Senate Bill 681](#) passed the full Senate unanimously on 32-0 votes.

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.