



**ANDRÉ JACQUE**

STATE SENATOR • 1<sup>ST</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

Phone: (608) 266-3512

Fax: (608) 282-3541

Sen.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

State Capitol • P.O. Box 7882

Madison, WI 53707-7882

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Contact: Senator André Jacques

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(608)-266-3513

## **JACQUE BILL TO PROTECT PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH PASSES SENATE**

*Measure gives first responders PTSD coverage under worker's compensation*

MADISON...With increasing suicide rates for first responders suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) now outpacing on-duty deaths, the state Senate, in a unanimous roll call vote, this afternoon approved the "Public Safety PTSD Coverage Act" to help the heroes who protect our communities.

State Sen. André Jacques, who authored the measure, 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 depend on as first responders who are affected by PTSD have access to treatment," Sen. Jacques said. "This support is crucial for their own health, and those who depend on them."

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. Senate Bill 11 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 Jacques 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. Jacques said.

Since being first proposed by Sen. Jacques in 2017, several other states including Minnesota have passed similar legislation, with negligible impact on overall workers compensation system costs.

Sen. Jacques 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. Jacques said. "This is a monumentally impactful and lifesaving first step among many that we need to take to address mental health and it is critical that these reforms be signed into law as soon as possible."

The Public Safety PTSD Coverage Act (Senate Bill 11) now heads to the State Assembly.

*Senator André Jacques 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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