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Assemblymember Rodriguez Introduces Legislation to Extend PTSD Protections to First Responders & Public Safety Communicators

(Sacramento, CA) – Today, Assemblymember Freddie Rodriguez (D – Pomona) introduced AB 597, which would expand existing industrial injury rebuttable presumption for a diagnosis of PTSD to public safety and emergency response employees. The expansion would include additional firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, public safety dispatchers, telecommunicators, and emergency response communicators.

“From my over 30 years of experience as a first responder, I understand the distress that can come with the job, as we are often alongside families during their most difficult moments. Current law needs to be expanded to provide all first responders the same protections that are only in place for some of us at this time,” **stated Assemblymember Rodriguez.**

In 2019, the Governor signed [SB 542 \(Stern, Chapter 390, Statutes of 2019\)](#) to create the PTSD industrial injury rebuttable presumption for firefighters and peace officers until January 1, 2025. Unfortunately, this law excludes EMTs and public safety communicators who are also on the front lines, experiencing traumatic events on the job. Current law also excludes active firefighters from specific state departments, and AB 597 would expand current law to include these additional firefighters.

[The International Association of Fire Fighters \(IAFF\) surveyed](#) 7,000 firefighters and found that past bad calls haunted 65%, 19% had experienced suicidal thoughts, and 27% had experienced substance abuse, among other findings. In a separate [study](#), the IAFF found that almost 20% of firefighters and paramedics suffer from PTSD.

In the study, [“Duty-Related Trauma Exposure in 911 Telecommunicators: Considering the Risk for Post-traumatic Stress,”](#) researchers found the rate of PTSD among telecommunicators is between 18-24%. This percentage includes individuals with sufficient reported symptoms to likely receive a diagnosis if they were formally evaluated.

“Our first responders are on the front lines working to protect Californians, and we must have effective laws in place to offer them protection when they are suffering from PTSD. This disease is a stress response that can occur after experiencing distressing calls that stick with you long after the incident. AB 597 is a sure way to ensure first responders in all capacities are treated equally,” **added Assemblymember Rodriguez.**

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Assemblymember Rodriguez ([Twitter](#)) represents the 53rd Assembly District which includes the cities of Chino, Montclair, Ontario, Pomona, and Upland. He is Chair of the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management.