



# PTSD Care for Fire Fighters

"James 'Dustin' Samples Act"

*"Saving Those Who Save Us"*



SB1023 BY BRIGGS

HB1356 BY RAMSEY

While most Americans are exposed to approximately three potentially traumatic events in their lifetime, fire fighters routinely experience as many as four unique traumatic events during a single shift, far exceeding the exposure rate of civilians.

Fire fighters frequently witness injury or death caused by natural disasters, chemical or biological exposure, multi-casualty accidents, community violence, drug overdoses, suicide and life-threatening events involving children.

Increasingly, fire fighters' duties require that they also respond to large-scale catastrophic events, including terrorist, manmade or technological disasters. Repeated exposure to these types of events, combined with stressful workplace conditions, results in meaningfully increased rates of trauma-related disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

While most fire fighters will experience post-traumatic stress during their career, some will develop the mental health disorder known as PTSD.



## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

PTSD is recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as a mental health condition that is triggered by exposure to or actual threatened death, serious injury or violence. Post-traumatic stress disorder occurs when an individual experiences symptom of intrusion, avoidance, increased arousal, reactivity, altered mood and thinking that persist longer than one month and significantly interfere with an individual's ability to function at work, home or other settings.

PTSD must be diagnosed by a qualified mental health care provider trained in psychiatric diagnostic assessment.

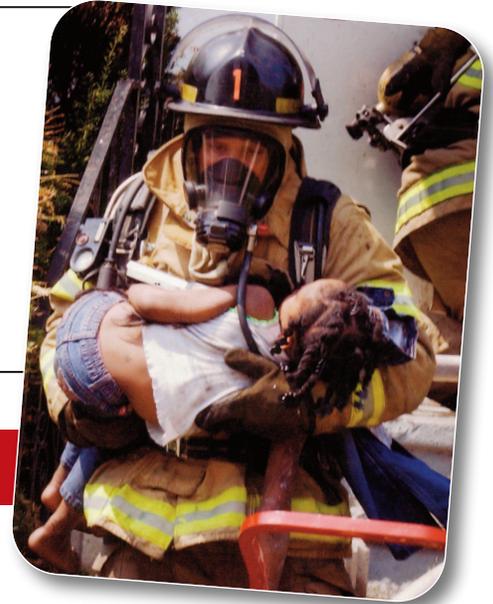
PTSD is widely accepted in the medical community as a treatable health condition. Evidenced-based treatment is available and effective. Despite the hope that treatment offers, stigma and fear of job insecurity remain major barriers to recovery. In a survey of nearly 7,000 professional fire fighters conducted by the IAFF, 86 percent said that stigma is a barrier to seeking treatment, while more than 80 percent reported fears that seeking treatment would cause them to be seen as weak or unfit for duty.

When fire fighters are diagnosed with PTSD, they face a system that is stacked against them. In the absence of presumptive legislation, the fire fighter must prove that his or her PTSD is work-related, which involves taking time off, finding specialized legal counsel and healthcare providers who understand occupational injury. Fire fighters must exhaust their hard-earned personal leave and financial savings to cope with an injury acquired on the job.

## PTSD Facts

- Individuals with PTSD are six times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>1</sup>
- Individuals with PTSD are at least 3-5 times more likely to suffer from major depression, which greatly increases their risk of death by suicide.<sup>2</sup>
- 40 percent of those who receive evidenced-based PTSD treatment no longer meet clinical criteria for the disorder.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kessler, et al (1999), <sup>2</sup>National Center of PTSD (2019), <sup>3</sup>Institute of Medicine



## What This Legislation Means:

1. If a fire fighter is diagnosed with PTSD, it is presumed to be an occupational injury and compensable under workers' compensation law.
2. A fire fighter diagnosed with PTSD can receive payment for medical care and lost wages.
3. A retired or inactive fire fighter diagnosed with PTSD within three years of their last date of employment is covered under this legislation.
4. A mental condition resulting solely from a good faith action of the employer (disciplinary action, job transfer, etc.) is not considered an occupational injury and is not covered under this legislation.

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## Definitions:

- **Employer:** Any city, county or political subdivision of the state that employs fire fighters and emergency medical services personnel.
- **Fire fighter:** Any regular or full-time, paid employee of a city, county or political subdivision of the state whose duties require the employee to actively engage in suppression of fires, rescue services or other emergency response tasks.
- **In the line of duty:** During employment and in the actual discharge of the duties of the position.
- **Mental health professional:** A person with professional training, experience and demonstrated competence in the treatment and diagnosis of mental health conditions and who is licensed to provide mental healthcare services.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder:** As defined by the most recent publication of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.