



International Brotherhood of Police Officers

A DIVISION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

H-5474

For

Written Testimony of:

Tony Capezza

Legislative Consultant

International Brotherhood of Police Officers (IBPO) and
National Association of Government Employees (NAGE)

Good evening Madame Chairwoman and Honorable Members of the Labor Committee. My name is Tony Capezza and I am the Lobbyist for both the National Association of Government Employees and the International Brotherhood of Police Officers.

I come before you this evening in support of H-5474 not only on behalf of my members but all working people who kept the State of Rhode Island open; they are all heroes.

Our police officers from day one went out on the streets as usual and never once complained of the extremely difficult conditions that they were working under during this entire pandemic. Because of the nature of their work the only PPEs they were able to wear were face masks, because gowns and face shields were too restrictive. However, their daily routine did not change. They still had to come into contact with many citizens, some of whom were not wearing masks, to take reports, and they still had to make arrests when needed. Many times while making an arrest their mask would be ripped off and some arrestees would spit and purposely cough in their face. As a result of these interactions, many of our officers tested positive for COVID and many others had to quarantine. This is where the problem came in, regarding the way some of the municipalities were treating these on the job injuries. Some wanted to treat this as sick time. For the most part, we were able to work with the municipalities and see to it that our members were not charged sick time, especially when they were ordered to quarantine. Other communities were not as cooperative. Currently, our attorney is in the process of suing two communities, the 40 day notice letters have already been sent.

Our NAGE nurses tend to patients in all divisions of the Eleanor Slater Hospital. Many of these patients that they tend to are some of the poorest people in the state, and many of them had been exposed to COVID. Our nurses work diligently each day without regard to their personal safety and treat these patients no differently than they would have treated anyone else. As a result, many of our nurses, as the police did, tested positive for COVID.

This is why H-5474 needs to become law, to protect all workers and ensure they are treated properly. I think it is important for the municipalities to remember that the long term effects of COVID are not known, and every member who tests positive may need treatment down the road. This is why they do not want to treat it as an on the job injury, because they know



they will be responsible for it, as they should be. This is no different than the federal government having to take responsibility for our veterans who became sick from Agent Orange.

For the above reasons I would ask the Committee to support H-5474.

Thank you for your time.