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The Honorable Anastasia Williams  
Chairwoman  
House Labor Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Williams and Committee Members:

The Northern RI Chamber of Commerce (NRICC) represents businesses in the communities of Burrillville, Central Falls, Cumberland, Foster, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, North Providence, North Smithfield, Pawtucket, Scituate, Smithfield and Woonsocket. The Chamber wishes to be on record in opposition to the passage of H.5474, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Workers’ Compensation – Occupational Diseases.

H.5474 creates a presumption that the contraction of COVID-19 is work related for employees in essential jobs. Currently, the Worker’s Compensation Act provides benefits for those where causation to work is established; and it is our understanding that a presumption has been given to EMS workers and health care workers while the pandemic continues.

H.5474 would give the presumption to public safety officials, including, but not limited to, police, fire, EMS, medical facility workers, correctional officers, dispatchers, paramedics, pharmacists, pharmaceutical technicians, grocery or retail workers, essential state and municipal employees, public transportation employees, parcel and freight delivery employees, and truck drivers and utility workers. For many of these individuals, it is just as likely, if not more likely, that they contracted COVID-19 from family members or friends

This change would result in increased premiums to Rhode Island businesses. Under current law, employees who cannot provide a direct causation, have benefits available to them through unemployment insurance, pandemic federal benefits, TDI and TCI. This change in workers’ compensation law unfairly places the financial burdens associated with COVID-19 on the business community.

For these reasons, the Northern RI Chamber of Commerce opposes the bill as written, and offers to work with this committee on this and all legislative matters.

Respectfully,



Lenette Forry-Menard

Legislative Lobbyist