

Testimony from Brian M. Daniels, Executive Director
Relating to Workers' Compensation – Occupational Diseases (H5474)
House Labor Committee
March 1, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to submit testimony on this legislation. We appreciate the Chair's concern for frontline workers, who have done tremendous work in the last year to protect the public and keep our economy going. In our cities and towns, public safety personnel – police, fire and EMS workers – have enforced public health guidelines, transported sick patients and now are leading the charge to vaccinate the public.

As we testified several weeks ago on a similar bill, H 5264, the League and its municipal members have been strong advocates for public safety personnel during the pandemic – calling on the state for more personal protective equipment and pushing state officials to share data with first responders about COVID cases in each community. In cases where municipal employees did contract or were exposed to COVID-19, local officials provided leave through a combination Injured on Duty, Federal FFCRA leave and sick time, to make sure people were able to recuperate or quarantine in a way most appropriate to their individual circumstances.

Now that the Federal FFCRA benefit has expired, some communities have temporarily established local leave programs similar to FFCRA to prevent employees from coming to work when sick, especially if they have little earned leave time available. Some communities have even paid for hotel accommodations for public safety personnel to quarantine to protect both their families and their coworkers. Further, because public safety personnel were included in the first phase of vaccinations and most of them have received both doses, we expect the number of work-related COVID-19 cases to drop substantially. For that reason, we believe that the new leave requirement established in this legislation will not likely be needed for public safety personnel.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views, and we appreciate your consideration of this request.