

March 25, 2025

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair
House Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: BILL NUMBER H-5372 – AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- RELIEF OF INJURED AND DECEASED FIRE FIGHTERS AND POLICE OFFICERS

Chair Casey and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, I am writing to respectfully express our opposition to House Bill 5372, which proposes to extend the presumption of in-the-line-of-duty disability coverage to police officers who suffer from heart disease, stroke, or hypertension. While we appreciate the intent of this legislation to support our dedicated public safety personnel, we have concerns about the potential financial and operational impact on municipalities across Rhode Island.

Current law already provides such a presumption for firefighters, acknowledging the unique occupational hazards they face. Expanding this presumption to include police officers without requiring sufficient evidentiary support could significantly increase municipal liabilities and strain already limited local resources. Rather than a blanket presumption, we respectfully suggest amending the language of the bill to require a determination based on a preponderance of evidence. This approach would ensure that claims are evaluated based on relevant medical and occupational factors while still providing necessary protections for officers who genuinely suffer job-related health issues.

Before moving forward with this policy shift, we believe it is essential to conduct a thorough fiscal analysis to determine the impact on municipal budgets and pension systems. Given the potential financial consequences, we believe it is imperative to conduct a detailed fiscal analysis to assess the cost burden on cities and towns. Only with this data can we properly weigh the benefits of this proposal against the ability of municipalities to afford it.

The League stands ready to work with the bill's sponsor and all stakeholders to develop legislation that effectively balances the needs of our public safety personnel with the fiscal realities and responsibilities of our cities and towns. It is imperative that any new policy supports our first responders while also maintaining the ability of municipalities to serve both their residents and taxpayers responsibly.

We appreciate your time and consideration of our perspective on this important matter. Please do not hesitate to reach out should you require additional information or wish to discuss potential amendments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. R. Rossi", written in a cursive style.

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Municipal Government and Housing