

**Appropriations Request**  
**HB 209 Mental Health Protections for First Responders**  
**Rep. Karen Kwan**

1. **HB 209 defines “first responders”** as a law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, advanced emergency medical technician, paramedic, firefighter, dispatch.
2. **Alleviates a barrier to mental health treatment for first responders**

Due to the nature of the job, first responders are at a high risk of being affected by mental disorders, such as PTSD. PTSD is likened to “death by 1000 cuts.” That is, it is multifactorial so the cause is difficult to prove. Often there is not a “sudden stimulus arising predominantly and directly from employment” as statute requires. Because of the extraordinary amount of stress arising from the job, first responders should be looked at differently. They are exposed to daily trauma and that trauma could “push them” over the edge.

This bill addresses one barrier to treatment by allowing for another pathway to process claims. This bill does not eliminate the process of determining a legal and causal connection except in the case of **1) first responder is 2) diagnosed with a mental health condition by a licensed physician or mental health care professional 3) after the individual becomes a first responder.**

3. **Fiscal note**

The Department of Administrative Service’s Risk Management Division estimates that HB209 would affect roughly 2,000 state employees. Of those employees, it is estimated that 10% will file a mental health claim. Thus, **\$2m** in increased Worker’s Comp claims.

4. Will there be a rush of claims? Not necessarily

By all accounts from first responders and first responder groups, personal and cultural stigma still impacts whether first responders seek treatment. We often see that they either hide their stress, use peer resources, or use self-medicating methods. By the time they decide on option of treatment, it’s often the last resort. Because of this, there is no indication that passing this bill would lead to a “rush” of claims. We should be encouraging our first responders to be as psychologically and mentally healthy as they can be.