



May 2, 2023

Chair Erin Murphy
Members of the Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Committee

RE: SF 1959 (Frentz) - Peace officer and firefighter disability provisions modifications and appropriations

Dear Chair Murphy and Members of the Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Committee,

We are writing to express our support for SF 1959, a bill related to public safety duty disabilities. We support SF 1959 because it would help curb current trends by implementing policies and funding to increase mental injury prevention and treatment initiatives so first responders will stay healthy on the job and so those who become injured can recover from mental injuries and potentially return to work. It is essential that the legislature implement ongoing (base) funding for all the provisions in the bill.

Public safety employees face situations in the line of duty that put them at risk for mental injuries. In recent years, Minnesota has seen troubling trends around public safety duty disabilities related to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Fortunately, according to experts, the risk of a mental injury can be lowered by implementing preventive measures, such as robust wellness programs, normalizing conversations about mental health and providing access to tools like peer support. Medical experts, including the Mayo Clinic, agree most people diagnosed with PTSD can be successfully treated if they receive timely and appropriate professional help.

When an employee becomes eligible for a Public Employees Retirement Association-Police and Fire (PERA-P&F) duty disability, the employee also becomes eligible for continued health insurance under Minn. Stat. § 299A.465. The statute, known as the Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB), provides that the employer at the time of injury is responsible for the continued payment of the employer's contribution for coverage of the officer or firefighter — and in some cases, the employee's dependents — until the employee reaches age 65.

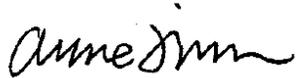
When the PSOB law was enacted, the state was fully reimbursing employers for the cost of complying with the continued health insurance mandate. In the early 2000s, the Legislature stopped fully funding the reimbursement account and passed an amendment to the statute that

said employers would only be reimbursed on a prorated basis. As of the end of fiscal year 2021, the state was only reimbursing \$1.367 million of the \$10.691 million requested by employers.

The members of our organizations believe there is a role for the state in helping employers and employees address the trends and costs pertaining to PTSD duty disability claims. SF 1959 contains provisions intended to help prevent mental injuries and funds treatment for first responders who suffer from mental injuries. The bill requires treatment for injured employees before a duty disability can be granted by PERA and provides state funding to keep employees on payroll while they are being treated. The bill also provides full state funding for the mandate that requires employers to continue health insurance benefits for employees who are approved for a PERA duty disability. The full reimbursement to cities contained in SF 1959 is a critical element in securing the support of cities across the state.

We respectfully request your support for this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Anne Finn,
Intergovernmental Relations Director
League of Minnesota Cities



Patricia Nauman
Executive Director
Metro Cities



James Hovland,
Mayor of Edina
President
Municipal Legislative Commission



Cap O'Rourke
Executive Director
Minnesota Association of Small Cities