

# Labor and Public Employees Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5279 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT ADDING WITNESSING A SERIOUS PHYSICAL INJURY AS A QUALIFYING EVENT FOR PURPOSES OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

**Title:** INJURY WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE.

**Vote Date:** 3/12/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/24/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor & Public Employees Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

The reason for this bill is to ensure that workers who witness a serious physical injury that doesn't result in the death or permanent disfigurement of a person as a qualifying event for an employee to be eligible for workers' compensation coverage for PTSD. At present, workers must have witnessed death or dismemberment in order to be eligible for a workers' compensation coverage for PTSD, and there may be cases where a worker receives a diagnosis of PTSD after having witnessed a lesser, albeit still serious, injury.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None provided.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Martin Looney, State Senate Pres Pro Tem, SDO:** Mr. Looney supports the bill as it would add witnessing a serious physical injury that does not result in death or permanent disfigurement as a qualifying event for workers compensation coverage for PTSD. The General Assembly in 1993 made a mistake when it changed the law and denied workers these benefits. Advances in neuroscience have demonstrated that the injuries connected to witnessing a violent death or maiming are real and occur in connection with employment, particularly for first responders. Previous bill expanded coverage to police officer, parole officers, fire fighters, EMS personal and expanded eligibility for PTSD. These changes were positive, and this bill will allow for compensation when an injury that is witnessed is serious.

**Carl Chisem, President, CT Employees Union Ind:** Supports the bill since their members work in various fields across the state and when one of them is harmed, they are all affected by the tragedy. They support adding witnessing serious physical injury as a qualifying even for PTSI workers comp coverage since their members experience tragedies on the job that can leave them emotionally harmed.

**Ed Hawthorne, President-Connecticut, AFL-CIO:** Mr. Hawthorne supports the bill and states in 1993 coverage for mental health injuries sustained on the job was removed. The legislature has taken positive steps to remedy the situation by requiring coverage for PTSI sustained by workers such as firefighters, police officers, dispatchers, EMS and corrections personnel. Workers who encounter traumatic events at work often struggle with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, sleepless and other mental health issues. Without the legislature recognizing these alignments as workplace injuries employs will continue have to pay out of their own pocket for treatment. HB 5279 recognizes that public servants could be just as traumatized by witnessing serious physical injuries and allows them to seek the treatment they require.

**Miles LaFemina, Correction Officer, AFSCME Council 4 Local 1565:** Supports the bill which adds witnessing a serious physical injury as a qualifying event for PSTI. They are speaking from the perspective of a corrections officer that work in an environment that is unpredictable and violent. Officers there witness stabbings, suicide attempts, and severe assaults as a reality of correctional work. They are required to intervene, render aid, and restrain violent individuals. Current law only allows for PTSI if death or serious disfigurement occurs. HB 5279 address this gap in a measured way. When PTSD goes untreated it results in increased overtime burden, increased sick time, staff shortages and in worst case suicides.

**Melanie Kolek, Legal Counsel, CEA:** Supports the bill and strongly agrees with the proposed language of the bill but states it does not go far enough. They state that the language should be expanded to include mental and emotional impairments for all employees that arise out of one's employment. The teachers they represent that are often scratched, pulled, bitten, and punched by the students they care for. The teachers then fear returning to school every day after being emotionally traumatized. There should be no fear in expanding workers compensation as checks and balances are already in place.

**Frank Deangelo, Derby Police Officer, AFSCME Council 4 Local 1376:** Supports the bill and tells officer Foley's story. Officer Foley responded to an incident in which a panicked person began firing on passing cars. They had to use deadly force to stop the threat. He then had to render life saving aid to that person. The stress compounded from this event, and he was placed on worker compensation for PTSD. Due to the current narrow laws on PTSD they stated he did not qualify. They are asking the committee to repair the current PTSD statue and support HB 5279.

**Marie Cetti, Bridgeport Police Officer, AFSCME Local 1159:** Mrs. Cetti supports HB 5279 and explains an incident she was involved with. She responded to a man yelling and threatening his family. She attempted to deescalate the situation, but the man lunged and stabbed her repeatedly. On of the assisting officers tried to stop him and the other had to shoot the man twice. The incident showed her that while she was covered for PTSD the other

officers who only witnessed it were not. PTSD treatment is a lifesaver that gets officers back to work which is why HB 5279 is needed.

**Michael Adams, Legislative Assistant, AFSCME Council 4:** Supports the bill and explained their union helped negotiate the passage of the 2019 workers compensation law. One of their nurses in Sandy Hook watched as the shooter walked by the office, Bristol police IT technicians had to watch the murder of two of their friends on body camera footage and corrections officers regular face suicide attempts and other life threatening incidents. They urge the committee to update the qualifying test in current law by supporting HB 5279

**Eric Smith:** Supports the bill for reasons largely unrelated to the content of the bill.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST:** Opposes the bill as it would significantly expand eligibility for workers compensation by adding witnessing a serious injury as a qualifying event. They state that this is overly vague and will lead to increased claims which may not be legitimate.

**Pete Myers, Senior Policy Director, CBIA:** Opposes the bill due to the potential cost increases with expanding the scope of coverage. The general assembly approved expansions of workers compensation benefits with including the addition of multiple body parts to the permanent partial disability schedule and expansion of section 31-208. While insurance rates have declined in recent years those rates are based on prior experience and do not reflect the long-term cost with the expansions. Due to this CBIA suggest a pause to further expansion of workers compensation benefits until the full impact of recent changes can be assessed.

**Sean McLaughlin, Regional Vice President, NAMIC, Eric George, President, Insurance Association of CT, and Kristina Baldwin, Vice President, APCIA:** Jointly oppose the bill as it seeks to further expand the scope of workers compensation coverage for PSTI by broadening the definition of qualifying events. This would result in increased costs for employers, municipalities, and insurers. They explain that workers compensation has been continuously expanded most notably in 2019 and 2023. Mental health claims are inherently complex, subjective, and prone to potential misuse. The lack of concrete diagnostic tools often makes it difficult to determine if a claim is genuinely work-related or influenced by external factors.

**Zachary McKeown, Advocacy Manager, CCM:** The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities represents 99% of CT's population and opposes HB 5279. They state that it would add a qualifying event that is overly vague and broad. This will create confusion, lead to higher insurance premiums and additional administrative burdens.

**Alex Ricciardone, Town Manager, Town of Southington:** Opposes the bill and states the current framework was done with years of negotiations with Municipalities, local offices, union representatives and various stakeholders. Everyone involved dealt in good faith to make a law that is meaningful. HB 5279 would undermine this by introducing ambiguity with such phrases as witnessing a serious physical injury being overly broad and lacking clinical precision. The ambiguity will result in increased litigation, higher insurance premiums and

additional administrative costs. The current system for PTSI functions well and adding in a broad witnessing clause would undermine it.

**Laurie Fernandez, HR Director, Town of Ridgefield:** Opposes the bill since adding in a broad new standard as witnessing physical injury could significantly expand PTSD claims. The cost associated with this could quickly impact a town like Ridgefield. Municipal budgets are already strained, and these additional costs would force tradeoffs in staffing and services. The vagueness of the bill will also result in disputes and inconsistent applications. Other alternatives to this bill exist such as funding employee assistance programs, and peer support teams.

**Reported by: Cam Clarke & Lawrence Sanchez      Date: 3/17/2026**