



OHIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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Ohio Legislature Appropriates \$40 Million for First Responder PTSD Fund

Last week, the Ohio General Assembly passed House Bill 184 with an amendment appropriating \$40 million to cover paid time off and medical benefits for first responders diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The funding will be directed to the *State Post-Traumatic Stress Fund*, which lawmakers originally established in 2020 through the enactment of House Bill 308.

While House Bill 184 does not yet create a mechanism for delivering benefits to first responders with PTSD, it represents an important step toward providing that coverage outside the state's workers' compensation statutes by using the state's General Revenue Fund for initial funding. The Ohio Chamber commends lawmakers for taking this decisive action following a joint letter urging lawmakers to act signed by the Ohio Chamber, Ohio Business Roundtable, the Ohio FOP, and the Ohio Association of Professional Firefighters.

The passage of House Bill 184 will now kick start conversations among the business community, first responders, and local governments to identify a workable system for providing this coverage. The Ohio business community continues to emphasize the importance of structuring benefits outside the state's workers' compensation statutes since the employer-paid system is designed to cover physical injuries and only those mental conditions arising from that physical injury.

The physical injury requirement is an important gatekeeper into the workers' compensation system since only those conditions arising out of and during the course of an individual's employment are eligible for coverage. The event leading to a physical injury is easily identifiable and ensures employer premiums only cover injuries stemming from a person's job. Whereas, mental only injuries are much more difficult to tie to a person's employment since a variety of non-work related factors can lead to someone's mental diagnosis.

However, the Ohio Chamber recognizes the unique challenges and circumstances that first responders face, which is why we are committed to developing a system that provides robust treatment options outside the state's workers' compensation statutes. This is not a new stance of the Ohio Chamber either. In fact, we worked to establish the State Post-Traumatic Stress Fund in 2020 and developed legislation that would provide first responders with medical and time off benefits with the introduction of House Bill 556 from the 131st General Assembly.

The Ohio Chamber looks forward to working collaboratively with first responders, local governments, and other stakeholders to develop a plan that provides robust treatment options without implicating the state's workers' compensation statutes.

Ohio House Advances Third Party Litigation Financing Reforms

During its final session of the year last week, the Ohio House passed [House Bill 105](#), a top ten priority of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber's key vote designation also helped secure broad bipartisan support, with the legislation passing by a vote of 76-14.

Before its passage, the House Insurance Committee amended HB 105 to require disclosure of all third party litigation financing (TPLF) agreements within 14 days after a lawsuit concludes. The new substitute bill also maintains a complete ban on foreign funding. These reforms will strengthen transparency and protect Ohio's courts from international actors who may attempt to exploit Ohio's courts. In fact, HB 105 prevents the nefarious practice of countries and other bad actors using lawsuits to gain access to a company's trade secrets through the discovery process.

House Bill 105 takes a significant step towards improving Ohio's civil justice climate, which the U.S. Chamber ranked as the 15th worst in the nation. For the first time, the business community will gain insight into the contents and prevalence of TPLF agreements through post-lawsuit disclosures. This post-litigation disclosure will allow businesses to identify trends in third party litigation financing, such as which types of lawsuits most frequently rely on outside financing and how those arrangements impact the cost of claims.

The Ohio Chamber also believes the post-lawsuit disclosure will also ameliorate the issues of third party litigation financing by reducing the secrecy

House Bill 105 now heads to the Ohio Senate and the Ohio Chamber will continue its advocacy in the upper chamber by explaining why the bill enhances predictability in Ohio's courts and ensures a stronger business and legal climate in the Buckeye State.

Ohio Defense Commission and the Ohio Defense Fund

Ohio has a strong and growing defense



industry. House Bill 292 creates the Ohio Defense Commission and the Ohio Defense Fund to support that industry. The Ohio Defense Commission will bring the private sector, public sector, and universities together to help defense companies choose Ohio, and expand in Ohio. The bill was introduced by Representative Ty Mathews and Representative Santucci. Matt MacLaren testified in favor of this bill for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce during its proponent testimony in the House Veterans and Military Development Committee on November 19.