

## COLORADO FOP POLICE PTSD LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

March 11, 2014 at 3:30pm

The Colorado FOP has submitted legislation into year's session sponsored by Rep Jonathon Singer, Rep Jared Wright, and Senator Lois Tochtrop currently pending assignment to committee for a hearing. Several additional legislators have come on board in support as co-sponsors. We do not have the bill number or committee assignment yet but should by the end of the week. This educational fact sheet will be distributed to all legislators when necessary.

Not surprisingly the Colorado Municipal League is strongly opposed and traditionally, with rare exception, opposes any legislation that promotes or improves the best interest of their employees in regards to terms and conditions of employment. The Chief's Association which is generally in lock step with their employers does also. However the Sheriffs' Association is in support and should be applauded and thanked for that decision. As far as the Chiefs of Police in Colorado are concerned, our guess is if you polled individual chiefs they would be in support, but there is a higher master to serve and as individuals would have to answer to their city bosses. It is what it is.

- **We have a problem in the police profession.** A killer walks among us that goes by the name of post-traumatic stress disorder. No wanted posters will be hung in the squad room because this killer is invisible. And for those professionals that it strikes, it is debilitating and severely impacts them and their well being. If left untreated this occupational disease destroys lives and for some tragically ends with their suicide.
- **A wide range of events is known to cause traumatic stress in peace officers during their careers.** Traumatic stress comes with the job and for most officers is processed psychologically and positively handled and they are able to move on. However a few cannot and will develop PTSD. The hiring process for law enforcement in Colorado includes psychological testing and screening. The testing/screening process is intended to weed out those who have or could develop psychological issues associated with the pressures of the job. It establishes a psychological base line at job entry. As such a large majority of officers are able to cope with and process the litany of traumatic stress that comes with their job; and do so over the length of a career of continuous exposure. However there are a few of these professionals who, for whatever reason, are unable to cope and eventually they develop PTSD.
- **The nature of the policing job at times requires officers to use force, including deadly force, to affect an arrest or end a violent confrontation.** The taking of another's life is traumatic by itself. However, because of necessary investigations surrounding these events the incident itself is prolonged and is re-lived over and over again by the involved officer(s), making it difficult to manage and process psychologically. And in the event of an error in judgment the real possibility of disciplinary action, litigation, or criminal

prosecution for their decisions. All of this contributes to the potential for a minority of officers to develop PTSD.

- **Affected officers who come forward with an admission of illness seeking help are left in limbo and often find themselves untreated and out of a job.** Most effected officers are fearful if they come forward seeking help they could lose their job or the respect of their fellow officers. As such those few who develop PTSD try to keep it a secret. They put on a happy face, but struggle daily with their disease which worsens over time. PTSD when left untreated manifests itself in flashbacks, night sweats, nightmares, insomnia, self medication through alcohol or drug abuse, disassociation with family and friends, isolation, depression, domestic violence, divorce, inappropriate use of force at work, and for some suicide.
- **It is a known fact that PTSD when left untreated, for some, sadly ends only with their suicide.** A police officer is just as likely to die by their own hand off duty as they are from an armed assailant while on duty. Regretfully, there are no statistics available to show the number of police marriages that failed as a direct result of job stress. Nor are there figures to show the number of officers who chose alcohol as a means to cope under the misconception that things are easier to see through a fog. And it is unknown the number of ill judged use of force issues that are attributed to someone on the job forced to secretly suffer from the effects of PTSD.
- **PTSD is a workplace injury. It is treatable.** PTSD is an occupational disease that needs to be addressed as such. Most who receive treatment can return to the job and continue their careers as productive professionals. Peace Officers love their jobs. They come into their profession knowing the dangers and what the job entails. They understand they may be seriously injured on the job and may have to give their lives if necessary protecting those they serve. They accept that proudly and perform their jobs admirably and heroically in keeping society safe. Very few if any understand or expect to be disabled by traumatic stress. Society has an obligation to help those injured in the line of duty who give so much for their communities and providing them psychiatric treatment is a small price to pay.

The peace officers of your districts and across this state **need your support** on this bill. Those few officers that contract and suffer from workplace induced PTSD need to know that treatment is available, and that they have some protection under law from employer abuse. Society has an obligation to take care of its protectors who suffer a work related injury and provide them the necessary treatment to aid in their recovery. That is a small price to pay for their sacrifice to those they so proudly serve. Please support this much needed change in the workers' comp statute.