



Testimony on HB 1279
Presented to the Senate Workforce Development Committee
Prepared by Daniel Fuller, West Fargo Fire Chief
Thursday, February 2nd, 2023

1 Chairman Wobbema and members of the Workforce Development Committee,
2 I am Daniel Fuller, Chief of the Department, City of West Fargo Fire & Rescue and my
3 testimony is in support of House Bill 1279. As a full-time firefighter in the State of North
4 Dakota for the past sixteen years, I have had the peace of mind of knowing that any
5 catastrophic cerebral vascular accident, sudden heart attack, cardiac arrest, and
6 cancer diagnosis would be presumed to be job related given the extremely hazardous
7 environment I've worked in over the years. I was not aware of the five-year clause
8 relating to these protections, and in 2021, we were all introduced of the harsh reality of
9 working in public safety with the on-duty sudden cardiac arrest of Officer Brown in West
10 Fargo. The aftermath and impact on his financial health as he was fighting for his
11 physical health created a sense of urgency in getting the five-year time frame
12 adjusted.

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14 As the Century Code stands today, roughly 90% of our career firefighters in West
15 Fargo are not covered by the presumption clause and risk the same challenges Officer
16 Brown has had to endure after recovering from his sudden cardiac arrest. With our
17 continued growth and addition of career firefighters over the next four years, with no
18 change to Century Code, we'll have at least 40% of our career workforce not covered
19 annually through 2032.

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21 The amendments proposed fully encapsulate my concerns on those employees
22 who have less than five years of service, as well as addressing past challenges in a
23 retroactive manner. A catastrophic medical event can take place, regardless of age
24 or time on service, while on duty or up to 48 hours after duty. Firefighting is routinely

25 recognized as one of the most dangerous professions in the world. Cardiac events
26 account for up to 45% of firefighter line of duty deaths annually in the United States. The
27 risk is not solely with older firefighters, but rather all firefighters, regardless of physical
28 fitness and age. The heavy work firefighters complete, coupled with the hot and hostile
29 environments and adrenaline surge from the work puts tremendous strain on the
30 cardiac system, vascular system, and even the blood profile of the firefighter. Not only
31 are firefighters at risk of a heart attack cause by the traditional thrombus (occlusion of a
32 major artery) but also from cardiac arrhythmia caused from trauma and exposure to
33 chemicals such as hydrogen cyanide during a fire.

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35 Firefighters have a 100x greater risk of death after firefighting activities compared
36 to station duties. As a profession, and on the local level, we try to modify our risk factors
37 as much as possible, such as increasing our physical fitness, annual heart and cancer
38 screenings, prohibiting tobacco use amongst employees, and addressing nutritional
39 issues. Most impactful, we have a mandatory physical conducted in accordance with
40 the provisions of the National Fire Protection Association 1582 Standard on
41 Comprehensive Occupational Medical Programs for Fire Departments. Beyond the
42 NFPA 1582 physicals, our department has also implemented a cardiac screening
43 program that includes a stress test, heart CT, lipid and cardiac marker panel, as well as
44 a vascular ultrasound. The cardiac screening is administered on a risk basis, with a
45 minimum of every five years for all fire department employees.

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47 Our career police officers and firefighters need to be covered for sudden,
48 catastrophic cardiac or vascular events that occur on duty and up to 48 hours after
49 duty, from their first day on the job. Our circumstances are uniquely different than the
50 civilian population and as such, deserve a unique solution to this challenge to make
51 sure no other career police officer or career firefighter has to fight twice as hard to
52 recover from these duty related incidents.

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54 Mr. Chairman, I ask for a Do Pass on this bill to send this to the Senate for a vote,
55 to show the support for Officer Brown, and all our career firefighters and career police

56 officers across the great state of North Dakota. Thank you for your time and the
57 opportunity to speak today. I'll stand for any questions the committee may have.

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61 References:

62 National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. Emmitsburg, MD

63 First Responder Center for Excellence for Reducing Occupational Illness, Injuries, and

64 Deaths, Inc. Crofton, MD