

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee

Every day across North Dakota, people go about their lives unaware of the heartbreak and horror some workers face in their line of duty. These moments are not temporary, ----- they linger, haunting those who were there. For these individuals, the trauma doesn't clock out when their shift ends. It follows them home, invades their dreams, and often leaves scars deeper than any physical injury.

Imagine the firefighter who responds to a call and finds a young man hanging from a tree in a cemetery, his family standing nearby, paralyzed by grief.

Consider the medic who hears the blood-curdling wails of a mother whose infant passed away in a baby swing.

Picture the first responder pulling a truck from a river, only to discover the lifeless bodies of an elderly couple who were trapped inside.

These workers are not strangers; they are our neighbors, friends, and family members. They are the ones who see the world's darkest moments so the rest of us don't have to.

They attempt to comfort crying children as they watch paramedics desperately perform CPR on their father after an overdose.

They stand over the broken body of a woman who met her untimely death on the interstate.

They enter a room where a student's pain ended with a gunshot, leaving their life on the wall behind them.

These are not just stories. They are real, and they take a toll that words cannot fully capture.

Senate Bill 2181 acknowledges that while these workers may seem unshakable, they are human.

The extraordinary stress and trauma they endure in their jobs can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that can cripple even the strongest among us. This bill ensures that when the weight of these moments becomes too much to bear, these workers will have access to the help they need to heal.

Mental injuries like PTSD are no less real than broken bones or burns. They affect a person's ability to work, maintain relationships, and enjoy life. By including a PTSD diagnosis as a compensable injury under workers' compensation, Senate Bill 2181 ensures that those who experience extraordinary trauma in the workplace are supported, not ignored or left to cope alone.

This is not just about first responders. Workers across industries can experience extraordinary trauma. Teachers may witness tragic accidents in the classroom. Healthcare workers might lose countless patients under heart-wrenching circumstances. Factory workers could find themselves first on the scene of an industrial disaster.

Trauma does not discriminate, nor should the protections offered by our laws.

By providing coverage for PTSD, this bill offers a lifeline to all workers in North Dakota. It ensures that when the unthinkable happens, those who step up in our most critical moments are not left behind.

This is more than a policy; it's a statement about what kind of state we want North Dakota to be. Passing this bill demonstrates that we value the people who hold our communities together in times of crisis. It tells them that their sacrifices will not go unnoticed and that their well-being matters.

Untreated PTSD doesn't just harm individuals; it affects families, workplaces, and entire communities. By addressing it early, this bill will help workers recover and return to their jobs, creating a stronger, healthier, and more resilient workforce for the future.

The sights, sounds, and experiences described above are not hypothetical; many of them are my own. --They are real, -- and they are happening in our communities.

For those who carry these burdens, Senate Bill 2181 offers a path toward healing and hope. It's time for us to step up for the people who step up for us every day.

I humbly ask the committee to Pass Senate Bill 2181 and show North Dakota's workers that their sacrifices matter, their mental health matters, and that they are not alone.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your time.

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