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SENT VIA EMAIL

Representative Carlos Mariani,
Committee Chair
Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Representative Mariani,

Thank you for all you do representing Minnesota. The City of Duluth and the residents we serve recognize the inherent dangers faced by peace officers and firefighters in the line of duty. The duties performed by public safety employees sometimes lead to physical and mental injuries. In recent years, the number of public safety employees seeking duty disability determinations through the Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) and making workers' compensation claims for line-of-duty injuries has accelerated. This is particularly true in the wake of a 2019 legislative change that made post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) a presumptive condition for workers' compensation purposes. The City is concerned about these trends for the following reasons:

- Every injury that leads to a PERA duty disability retirement and/or workers' compensation claim impacts the employee, the employee's family and the employee's organization.
- The current system for processing and addressing duty disability benefits can be incompatible with the goal of restoring good health and returning employees to work.
- The fiscal impact of the increasing number of claims is unsustainable for employers and, ultimately, taxpayers.
- Public safety agencies, particularly those that are very small and already experiencing recruitment and retention challenges, will not remain viable if they continue to sustain significant personnel losses.

Given these concerns, the City has invested resources into mental and physical injury education, prevention and treatment. In order to achieve optimal outcomes, additional statewide policies and resources are necessary. The City of Duluth supports:

- Full state funding for the Public Safety Officer Benefit Account that reimburses employers for providing continued health insurance to police officers and firefighters injured in the line of duty and dependents of those killed (Minn. Stat. § 299A.465);
- Funding to reimburse local governments for providing paid time off to public safety employees who experience work-related trauma and/or are seeking treatment for a mental injury;
- Funding for initiatives and programs that provide peer support, emotional trauma training, early intervention and mental health treatment;
- Requiring public safety college programs to include mental health and specifically PTSD education as part of their curriculum, focusing on prevention and coping;

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- Funding for emotional trauma training for pre-service and in-service public safety officers; and
- Advancing wellness for public safety employees as a component of law enforcement reform.

Thank you for your consideration, for all that you do, and please do not hesitate to reach out if needed.

Sincerely,



Noah Schuchman
Chief Administrative Officer

