



TEXAS STATE ASSOCIATION *of* FIRE FIGHTERS

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HB 1521: Texas Fire Fighters Urge Passage of Legislation to Protect First Responders from Illegal Denials of Workers' Compensation Insurance Claims

Rep. Burrows, Bipartisan Joint Authors: System is 'plagued by delays and abuse'

AUSTIN, Texas, Feb. 7, 2019 – Today, Rep. Dustin Burrows (R-Lubbock) and four joint authors filed House Bill 1521 which would penalize insurers that illegally deny Texas first responders access to medical treatment for line-of-duty injuries covered under state workers' compensation laws.

This proposed legislation would amend Section 415.021 of the Labor Code to add sanctions, administrative penalties, and other remedies, including attorney's fees, for administrative violations by self- or collectively insured municipalities obligated to cover eligible workers' compensation claims. The amount of the administrative penalty shall not be less than two times the total amount of benefits payable in connection with the first responder employee's claim.

Rep. Burrows said, "The current workers compensation system for firefighters and police officers in Texas is plagued by delays and abuse. Private insurers have largely been replaced by cities that are either self-insured or in a risk pool. This has resulted in widespread denials and delays by the cities when it comes to nearly any on duty related injury or illness." Joint authors of HB 1521 are Rep. Joe Moody (D-El Paso), Rep. Jeff Leach (R-Plano), Rep. Oscar Longoria (D-La Joya), and Rep. Morgan Meyer (R-Dallas).

TSAFF President John Riddle said, "Texas cities and their workers' comp administrators, such as Texas Municipal League, too often deny coverage of life- and career-saving medical treatment for firefighters with legitimate insurance claims. Up to now, they have done so with impunity. With state law clearly on our side, Texas firefighters will continue to fight to hold workers' comp insurers like Texas Municipal League accountable. We thank this bipartisan group of legislators for standing with first responders that become ill or are injured in the line of duty."

Chapter 607 of the Texas Government Code provides that Texas firefighters are entitled to receive the medical treatment they have earned as they risked their own lives protecting others. Yet about 91 percent of Texas firefighter cancer insurance claims are denied despite Texas' "presumptive" law which covers related medical care, according to the Texas Department of Insurance.

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