

## Testimony on S.42 Bradley Reed President, Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont

Good afternoon, my name is Bradley Reed, I am the President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont. We represent 250 paid professional union firefighters, EMT's and paramedics in communities across Vermont. As you are all aware, our members are exposed to traumatic stress over the term of their career and as a result, some suffer from PTSD and other service connected behavioral health injuries. We were proud to work closely with the Vermont legislature in 2017 and grateful for passage of a first in the nation presumption for PTSD and legislation that would allow our members to seek workers' compensation coverage for service connected injuries. This has proven to be a big step forward in breaking down the stigma, and providing an opportunity for our members to seek help when they need it most.

Statistics show that first responders are experiencing traumatic stress injuries at rates similar to that of our armed military services. The striking rate of suicidal ideation and attempted suicides by first responders is a sobering reminder that the stressors we endure day in and day out have a real emotional impact. Vermont set the example for the rest of the country in terms of providing real avenues for recognizing this crisis, treatment of occupational injuries, and breaking the stigma associated with behavioral health injuries, however we are still in the beginning phase of truly eradicating it's devastating impacts. S. 42 is a bill that would establish a commission of first responders and other stakeholders who would be given certain authority to recommend policy and best practices to our legislators. We are committed to supporting this effort as it is important to the wellness of our first responders who will continue to be exposed to some of the most horrific events that occur in our communities.

I wanted to keep my testimony brief today so that our message urging support and swift passage of this legislation is clear.

In closing, I would again like to say thank you from the Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont for your continued interest in the wellness of our members who are truly Vermont's Bravest. And thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S.42. I am happy to answer any questions.