

Illinois Public Pension Fund Association

NEWS

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IPPFA praises signing of First Responders Suicide Prevention Act

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Public Pension Fund Association (IPPFA) today praised the signing of the Illinois First Responders Suicide Prevention Act, a new law the IPPFA drafted that will help fight the number one cause of duty-related deaths in the state. Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed the legislation today at the Illinois State Police headquarters in Springfield, and the law takes effect immediately.

“This new law is a major step toward saving the lives of everyday heroes, those who run toward danger rather than away from it and have for years suffered silently because of it,” said IPPFA President James McNamee. “This will give police officers and firefighters the assistance they need to save their own lives while they work every day to save ours.”

The legislation, which overwhelmingly passed the Illinois General Assembly as House Bill 2766, provides that any emergency services or public safety employee may refer any fellow first responder for mental health services through an employee assistance or peer counseling program. If such a program is not available through the employee's agency, the legislation authorizes that help may be sought from any available mental health assistance program. Most importantly, the bill mandates that any oral or written information communicated during these mental health sessions would be strictly confidential and could not be used in any judicial hearing, arbitration, or other adjudicatory proceeding.

The IPPFA drafted the bill more than two years ago. It was written by IPPFA board member and first responder Shawn Curry, and the legislation gained steam following several recent first responder suicides in Illinois.

“Crimes, fires and other emergencies have not gone down, and as we place more duties on fewer people, those people need to have access to confidential help when they need it,” McNamee said. “The attempted suicide rate for first responders such as police officers and firefighters is more than ten times the rate of the general public, and this new law will literally save lives.”

This spring and summer the IPPFA partnered with the Northern Illinois University Psychology Department to develop training for first responder mental health service providers. This training will be accredited through the university and can be taught through the state's university system.

A recent study by the Ruderman Family Foundation examined depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other issues affecting first responders and the rates of suicide in departments nationwide. The study determined that first responder suicides outnumber all line of duty deaths in the United

States, making it the number one cause of death for firefighters, police officers, probation and corrections officers, paramedics and ambulance personnel.

The IPPFA was founded in 1985 as a not-for-profit organization whose mandate was to educate public pension fund trustees. In 2009 the IPPFA became the primary education provider for public pension fund trustees in the state of Illinois, and its members manage more than \$18 billion in pension assets.

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