



# “Unity Is Strength”

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## Testimony

**Date:** February 21, 2022

**To:** The Honorable Renee Erickson, Chairperson, Senate Committee on Commerce

**From:** Dave Johnston, President Kansas Emergency Medical Services Association

**RE:** Proponent testimony for Senate Bill 491,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 491. My name is Dave Johnston, I am the EMS Chief for Reno County in addition to that role I also serve as the President of the Kansas Emergency Medical Services Association (KEMSA).

I have served as a paramedic in Kansas for over 30 years and when I began my career, I knew that I would encounter difficult scenes. I have had several incidents that have created lasting memories that I wish I did not have. Most of those hard memories involve children. I have been fortunate to navigate through those incidents without having crippling effects on my psyche. This has been due in part to support mechanisms from the agencies I served.

KEMSA, in addition to many other public safety entities, has taken several steps over the years to fully support our frontline staff when they encounter incidents that can leave lasting scars on their mental health. Education on self-care and mental health first aid training has been provided to thousands of providers across the state. Critical Incident Stress Debrief (CISD) teams are available for sentinel events such as pediatric incidents or officer-involved accidents. Peer Support teams and training have been made available to provide integral support mechanisms for agencies and their staff. Most agencies offer referral for professional psychiatric help through employee impact programs.

Most EMS providers who are faced with a work-related event that is difficult to deal with find help from one of the support mechanisms listed above. There is still an impact on their life, they may need a short time away from frontline duties, but they are able to move forward and remain in the profession. There are some providers that despite all the support they are given struggle to return. This is by no means a shortcoming of the individual EMS provider but a function of the tragedy or stressor they have encountered from a work-related incident.

Currently those EMS providers who are afflicted by PTSD from a work-related event but have not suffered physical injuries are not provided workers compensation to cover mental health treatments nor time away from work. It seems unjust not to fully support those first responders who daily support our communities in times of tragedies.

Senate Bill 491 offers a narrow framework to provide coverage for first responders who have been undeniably impacted from an on-duty mental health injury. KEMSA and other organization will continue to provide mental health education and support in a proactive manor for our first responders. I humbly ask for your support of our first responders in moving this legislation forward.

David Johnston

President, Kansas Emergency Medical Services Association