



Ohio Municipal League

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PRESS RELEASE FOR GENERAL DISTRIBUTION

February 23, 2016

The Ohio Municipal League (OML) testified today in Ohio Senate Insurance Committee in opposition to Senate Bill (SB) 27 which provides that a firefighter who is disabled as a result of certain types of cancer is presumed for purposes of the laws governing Worker's Compensation and the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund to have incurred the disease while performing official duties as a firefighter. Because we testified first, OML was not given an opportunity to respond to specific mentions of our organization. We represent the managers of public safety forces throughout Ohio and believe our arguments must be given due attention.

The OML's testimony is attached. It was later testified that firefighters have escalated risk of cancer and that it is a horrible disease. However, you may have noticed that each of the firefighters mentioned were getting treatment--they were not being denied treatment. We want to reaffirm what we said in our testimony: **that no firefighter should ever be denied healthcare treatment for cancer.**

The question regarding SB 27 is not whether firefighters will get treatment, but rather how will it be paid for and who will pay for it. The proponents are turning a technical funding issue into a humanitarian issue. We all believe in the humanitarian cause and we were offended at the notion, suggested at this committee, that we do not care. Under current law, Workers Compensation should always cover firefighter cancer (under 4123.68, as explained in our testimony) but if Workers Compensation does not cover the claim, then their health insurance will cover it—ensuring that no firefighter is denied treatment. If there is a problem with firefighters getting denied treatment, we absolutely would support legislation that appropriately deals with that, such as a state fund for re-insurance.

We were also accused of opposing this bill for fiscal reasons alone but there is much more to it than that. SB 27 is state legislation that puts all the costs on local governments without asking the state to put up anything from its budget. We believe that proponents of SB 27 are genuinely distraught with the cancer epidemic but SB 27 does not require anything from the state government that is proposing it. Testimony was offered today about how Governor Kasich has turned Ohio's budget into a surplus. However, those funds are not in question here. Rather, it is local government funds in question. Local government budgets have already been decreased dramatically by state policy, especially over 50% cuts in the Local Government Fund (see: <http://innovationohio.org/2013/09/20/reductions-in-local-government-funding-leading-to-deep-cuts-in-communities/>).

Further, cancer is afflicting over 66,000 people in Ohio year--the cancer epidemic is not unique to firefighters as SB 27 purports. The Worker's Compensation system only handles work-related injuries.

Lastly, as outlined in our testimony, Ohio's Workers Compensation laws already provide a path to coverage, as outlined in our testimony. Importantly, ORC 4123.68 already lets firefighters into the Workers Compensation system if their employment, "creates a risk of contracting the disease in greater degree and in a different manner from the public in general."