

SENATE BILL NO. 1778
(First Reprint)

To the Senate:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Senate Bill No. 1778 (First Reprint) without my approval.

Since New Jersey's workers' compensation law was enacted more than a century ago, the unique circumstances surrounding workplace injuries of all employees - including our State's public safety workers - have been considered in the context of the fact-sensitive circumstances surrounding each incident. This time-tested process appropriately balances all facts necessary to determine a proper compensation award. In contrast, this bill alters that careful balance by providing public safety workers with a presumption to workers' compensation, rebuttable only by clear and convincing evidence. This sweeping new standard would apply to disabilities associated with an array of enumerated incidents and, in some cases, disabilities not tethered to any work-related incident at all.

As a State, we must continually recognize the selfless contributions of our first responders. Day in and day out, these brave women and men make enormous sacrifices in order to ensure our collective safety, health, and well-being against all manner of threats. That essential public service, and the costs associated with the injuries those duties may cause, must be administered in a responsible manner that matches our public resources. Although this measure would likely have a significant impact on State, local, and municipal government budgets, the bill's sponsors refused to obtain a fiscal analysis or refer the bill to either house's respective budget

committees. Regrettably, the Legislature's failure to pursue the responsible course of thoroughly reviewing the significant changes to a successful and long-standing system, and the corresponding impact of this proposal on taxpayers, prevent my approval.

Our public safety workers are vital to our State and I am committed to ensuring their well-being and protection. Reasoned suggestions for improving those practices should be openly and honestly evaluated. While I welcome a discussion on new ways to enhance the lives of emergency responders, the truncated and insufficient manner in which this proposal was prepared and passed is not consistent with our responsibility as elected representatives of all citizens.

Accordingly, I herewith return Senate Bill No. 1778 (First Reprint) without my approval.

Respectfully,

[seal]

/s/ Chris Christie
Governor

Attest:

/s/ Charles B. McKenna
Chief Counsel to the Governor