

SENATE, No. 4165

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED NOVEMBER 22, 2021

Sponsored by:

Senator JAMES BEACH

District 6 (Burlington and Camden)

Senator LINDA R. GREENSTEIN

District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)

SYNOPSIS

Provides employment protections for paid first responders diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder under certain conditions.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 11/22/2021)

1 **AN ACT** concerning paid first responders and post-traumatic stress
2 disorder and supplementing Title 34 of the Revised Statutes.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
7 1. This act shall be known as the "New Jersey First Responders
8 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Protection Act."

9
10 2. As used in this act:

11 "Employee" means a first responder holding a position of paid
12 employment with an employer.

13 "Employer" means an entity that employs paid first responders.

14 "First responder" means a law enforcement officer, paid
15 firefighter, or paid member of a duly incorporated first aid,
16 emergency, ambulance, or rescue squad association.

17 "Law enforcement officer" means a person employed as a
18 permanent full-time member of any federal, State, county or
19 municipal law enforcement agency, department, or division of those
20 governments who is statutorily empowered to act for the detection,
21 investigation, arrest, conviction, detention, or rehabilitation of
22 persons violating the criminal laws of this State or of the United
23 States and statutorily required to successfully complete a training
24 course approved by the Police Training Commission pursuant to
25 P.L.1961, c.56 (C.52:17B-66 et seq.), or certified by the
26 commission as being substantially equivalent to an approved
27 course.

28
29 3. a. An employer shall not discharge, harass, or otherwise
30 discriminate or retaliate or threaten to discharge, harass, or
31 otherwise discriminate or retaliate against an employee with respect
32 to the compensation, terms, conditions, duties, or privileges of
33 employment on the basis that the employee took or requested any
34 leave related to a qualifying diagnosis of post-traumatic stress
35 disorder. Following a period of leave related to a qualifying
36 diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, an employer shall
37 reinstate an employee whose fitness to return to work has been
38 documented by a licensed physician or licensed mental health
39 professional to the position and duties held by the employee prior to
40 the leave.

41 b. A diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder is qualified
42 under subsection a. of this section if:

43 (1) the diagnosis is made by a licensed physician or licensed
44 mental health professional; and

45 (2) as determined by the licensed physician or licensed mental
46 health professional, the post-traumatic stress disorder arose:

1 (a) as a direct result of the employee experiencing or witnessing
2 a traumatic event during and within the scope of the performance of
3 regular or assigned duties of the employee; or

4 (b) due to vicarious trauma experienced by the employee as a
5 direct result of the performance of regular or assigned duties of the
6 employee.

7
8 4. a. An employee or former employee may institute a civil
9 action in the Superior Court for relief upon a violation of any of the
10 provisions of section 3 of this act. All remedies available in
11 common law tort actions shall be available to a prevailing plaintiff.
12 The court may also order any or all of the following relief:

13 (1) an assessment of a civil fine of \$5,000 for the first violation
14 of any of the provisions of section 3 of this act and \$10,000 for each
15 subsequent violation;

16 (2) an injunction to restrain the continued violation of any of the
17 provisions of section 3 or section 4 of this act;

18 (3) reinstatement of the employee to the same position or to a
19 position equivalent to that which the employee held prior to
20 unlawful discharge or retaliatory action;

21 (4) reinstatement of full fringe benefits and seniority rights;

22 (5) compensation for any lost wages, benefits, and other
23 remuneration;

24 (6) payment of reasonable costs and attorney's fees.

25 b. An action brought under this section shall commence within
26 one year of the date of the alleged violation.

27 c. A private cause of action provided for in this section shall be
28 the sole remedy for a violation of this act.

29
30 5. This act shall take effect immediately.

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33 STATEMENT

34
35 This bill establishes employment protections for paid first
36 responders who are diagnosed with certain cases of work-related
37 post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

38 Under the bill, an employer would be prohibited from
39 discharging, harassing, or otherwise discriminating against an
40 employee, or threatening to do so, with respect to the compensation,
41 terms, conditions, duties, or privileges of employment on the basis
42 that the employee took or requested any leave related to a
43 qualifying diagnosis of PTSD. Under the bill, a PTSD diagnosis
44 qualifies if it is made by a licensed physician or licensed mental
45 health professional and as determined by the practitioner, the post-
46 traumatic stress disorder arose:

1 (1) as a direct result of the employee experiencing or witnessing
2 a traumatic event during and within the scope of the performance of
3 regular or assigned duties of the employee; or

4 (2) due to vicarious trauma experienced by the employee as a
5 direct result of the performance of regular or assigned duties of the
6 employee.

7 The bill provides that if an employer violates its provisions, an
8 employee or former employee would be authorized to institute a
9 civil action in the Superior Court for relief. All remedies available
10 in common law tort actions would be available to a prevailing
11 plaintiff. Additionally, the bill provides that a court would be
12 authorized to order any or all of the following relief:

13 (1) an assessment of a civil fine of \$5,000 and \$10,000 for each
14 subsequent violation;

15 (2) an injunction to restrain the continued violation of any of the
16 provisions of the bill;

17 (3) reinstatement of the employee to the same position or to a
18 position equivalent to that which the employee held prior to
19 unlawful discharge or retaliatory action;

20 (4) reinstatement of full fringe benefits and seniority rights;

21 (5) compensation for any lost wages, benefits and other
22 remuneration;

23 (6) payment of reasonable costs and attorney's fees.

24 The bill defines a "first responder" to include a law enforcement
25 officer, paid firefighter, or paid member of a duly incorporated first
26 aid, emergency, ambulance, or rescue squad association. "Law
27 enforcement officer" is defined in the bill as a person employed as a
28 permanent full-time member of any federal, State, county or
29 municipal law enforcement agency, department, or division of those
30 governments who is statutorily empowered to act for the detection,
31 investigation, arrest, conviction, detention, or rehabilitation of
32 persons violating the criminal laws of this State or of the United
33 States and statutorily required to successfully complete a training
34 course approved by the Police Training Commission or certified by
35 the commission as being substantially equivalent to an approved
36 course.