

From: Minister of Labour (MOL) [<mailto:MinisterofLabour@ontario.ca>]
Sent: April-19-16 12:43 PM
To: Minister of Labour (MOL)
Subject: Letter from the Minister of Labour / Lettre du ministre du Travail

Message from the Minister of Labour

I am proud to write today to inform your municipality that Bill 163, the *Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, 2016*, has passed third reading and received Royal Assent on April 6, 2016. Municipalities across Ontario play a vital role in the delivery of emergency services. Consequently, it is important that municipalities are aware of this critical legislation to support Ontario's first responders.

Over the last decade there has been an increased awareness of the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We know PTSD can be serious and debilitating, and that first responders are at least twice as likely as the general population to suffer from PTSD.

The Premier asked me to bring forward a plan that addressed prevention of and resiliency to PTSD, and she also asked that we create legislation that makes PTSD a workplace presumption for first responders. First responders put their lives at risk each and every day to keep all of us safe, and it's important we provide our first responders the same unconditional support they provide to us when we need them.

That's why I committed Ontario to becoming a leader in dealing with first-responder PTSD, and we know the solution lies with a comprehensive approach that includes both preventative and legislative measures. The *Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, 2016* is a key component of that comprehensive strategy. It will provide a presumption that PTSD diagnosed in first responders is work-related, allowing for faster access to WSIB benefits, resources and the timely treatment needed to heal and return to work safely.

The specific groups covered under the PTSD presumption include:

- Police, including First Nations constables, and chiefs of police
- Firefighters (including part-time and volunteer firefighters), including those who are employed or who volunteer to provide fire protection services on a reserve, fire investigators, and fire chiefs
- Paramedics and emergency medical attendants, and ambulance service managers
- Workers involved in dispatching emergency services, including workers who play a role in the chain of communications which lead up to the dispatch for ambulance services, firefighters and police
- Correctional officers/youth services workers (including managers) and workers who provide direct health care services in adult institutional corrections and secure youth justice facilities
- Members of emergency response teams dispatched by a communications officer.

The *Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, 2016* also amends the *Ministry of Labour Act* to allow the Minister of Labour to collect information about an employer's plans to prevent PTSD and authorizes the Minister to publish those plans. Collecting this information is intended to encourage the development of prevention plans and assess progress in the prevention of PTSD in these workplaces. It will also serve to highlight gaps and inform future prevention initiatives.

I will formally direct certain employers to provide me with information on their workplace post-traumatic stress disorder prevention plans by April 23, 2017. This direction will be published in the *Ontario Gazette*, Volume 149, Issue 17, which will be available at www.ontario.ca/search/ontario-gazette. Additional information can also be found on the Ministry of Labour website at www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/ptsd.php.

As your municipality is an employer or is responsible for employers of workers covered under the PTSD presumption, I am advising you of this direction and look forward to receiving information in a timely manner. You are able to determine an approach that reflects your local context, taking into consideration the ways that first responder services are delivered and supported locally. I would request that you forward this correspondence to any administrations that fall within your purview, so they are aware of the direction to submit information and are engaged in the process as appropriate.

Information about prevention plans should be submitted in electronic Word format to ptsdprevention@ontario.ca. When submission by this method is not possible, information can be mailed to the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Att: PTSD Prevention Plan, 400 University Avenue, 14th Floor, Toronto, ON, M7A 1T7. Resources to assist in the development of a prevention plan are available online as part of a free online toolkit (see the link below). Should you have any questions, please contact ministry staff at 416-325-4575.

These legislative amendments build on our previously announced PTSD prevention strategy, which includes:

- The creation of a radio and digital campaign aimed at increasing awareness about PTSD among first responders, their families and communities and eliminating the stigma that too often prevents those in need from seeking help
- An annual leadership summit to be hosted by the Minister of Labour to highlight best practices, recognize leaders, and monitor progress in preventing and addressing PTSD
- A free online toolkit at www.firstrespondersfirst.ca with resources on PTSD tailored to meet the needs of employers and each of the first responder sectors
- Grants for research that supports the prevention of PTSD.

We started on the prevention initiatives in March 2016 with the launch of the public radio and digital awareness campaign, as well as the free online toolkit.

Through the alignment of research, prevention and treatment efforts, Ontario will create a solid and coordinated set of resources to provide the support needed by the brave men and women who put their lives on the line in our time of greatest need. This is the beginning of a new way forward in preventing PTSD and providing support for our first responder community in Ontario.

With your help, our government has put in place a strategy that will help protect our dedicated first responders who put themselves in harm's way to ensure our safety.

These changes will positively impact many lives across the province, and will provide our 73,000 first responders and their families some peace of mind.

Please accept my thanks for your support.

Sincerely,

[Original signed by]

Kevin Flynn
Minister of Labour