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For Immediate Release

May 20, 2021

COVID-19 presumption bill finally passes, heads to the Governor's desk

AUSTIN — After a long and often bitter battle, SB 22, otherwise known as the COVID-19 presumption bill, passed the Texas State Legislature today.

COVID presumption legislation is a huge step forward for officers who have suffered from COVID-19 and the surviving families who have lost an officer to COVID-19.

Since March 2020, the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas, or CLEAT, has been fighting for COVID-19 to be recognized as a presumptive illness for all first responders. CLEAT gained bipartisan support and educated as many legislators as possible leading up to the 87th legislative session. **The bill passed with a final record vote of 139 to 6.**

Among the families fighting for a COVID presumptive bill was Michelle Brown, widow of fallen Harris Co. Constable's Office Pct 5 Investigator Mark Brown, Rachel Lehman Vega, widow of fallen Lynn Co. Sheriff Abraham Vega, and Pauline Pedraza-De La Fuente, widow of fallen Bexar Co. Sheriff's Office Detention Deputy Timothy De La Fuente. All three widows made the trip to Austin multiple times, waiting hours to testify in front of committee members.

"Working with CLEAT has been the only glimmer of hope that I've had over the last year in terms of getting assistance and the attention of the Governor's office." Said Michelle Brown, widow of fallen Investigator Mark Brown. "My husband paid the ultimate price, and the passing of SB 22 is just a start for the recognition my husband's death deserves by the state of Texas as a line of duty death."

Texas has lost **over 100** officers to COVID-19, and their families deserve the benefits for their fallen officers.

"It's a long and overdue bill for Texas first responders and their families." Said CLEAT Executive Director Charley Wilkison. "This presumptive measure safeguards workers compensation benefits, not only for first responders but for their families if they die due to COVID."

"This legislation has overridden the political obstructions and made the promise to Texas first responders," Wilkison said. "This bill gives first responders and their families that promise that Texas will finally have their back."