



NEWS RELEASE

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Media Contact:
Alex Price
CLEAT Communication Specialist
p: 512.609.7770
e: alex.price@cleat.org

Line of Duty COVID-19 Exposures

AUSTIN — “COVID-19 should be ruled a presumptive occupational disease,” said Charley Wilkison, Executive Director of the state’s largest law enforcement union, the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas, or CLEAT. “As Texas law enforcement officers continue to contract this deadly disease, the least our state government can do is to officially presume that their exposure came from their work serving and protecting their communities.”

“Texas law enforcement personnel are working without proper gear. They are being called into harm’s way with no way out. We are calling on state leaders to do the right thing by Texas law enforcement personnel and all First Responders by making COVID-19 a presumptive disease.” Said Wilkison.

The Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas represents the largest number of law enforcement and detention officers in the State of Texas. Last week it became clear that a large portion of our membership has a high probability of being exposed to COVID-19 while on duty. Several officers have already tested positive.

A number of agencies have expressed concerns about the lack of PPE available to their officers and/or deputies. CLEAT alerted Governor Abbott of that fact this weekend. Our intention is to remedy that issue as soon as possible. We are also aware of a few officers who have already tested positive for COVID-19 and many more who are currently quarantined after coming into contact with an infected person while on duty.

Now CLEAT is asking the Texas Department of Insurance and the Workers Compensation Commission to further extend statutory presumptions to include COVID-19 as work-related for all first responders so that when they contract or test positive for COVID-19, it would be considered in the line of duty.

Law enforcement officers and jailers are risking everything, sometimes without even access to the proper equipment, and the least we can do at this stage is ensure their families are covered if they were to contract this disease.

The Fort Worth Police Association, a CLEAT affiliate, has reached out to their Mayor expressing the same concerns.

“The hardworking police officers in Fort Worth Texas need to be assured the workers compensation system will protect them. We respectfully request that COVID 19 exposure be classified as a covered injury/illness.” (Manny Ramirez, President, Fort Worth Police Officers Association)

While there may be cities currently working toward something similar, it is our duty to see that all law enforcement, first responders, and jailers in the state are covered and treated equally with regard to contracting COVID-19.

CLEAT is asking the State of Texas to intervene and add a rule, change language through Executive Order, and do whatever it takes to immediately consider law enforcement officers, jailers, and all other first responders who test positive for COVID-19 as in the line of duty exposure as it pertains to workers compensation.

We must take care of first responders and their families during this very difficult time.

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