

Gov. Pritzker Signs Act-Of-Duty Bill

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SPRINGFIELD – Governor JB Pritzker was joined today by Lieutenant Governor Julianna Stratton, Illinois State Comptroller Susana A. Mendoza, elected officials, and first responders to sign the Act-of-Duty Bill into law. HB 3162 retroactively provides Chicago police officers and firefighters disability benefits for the time they were unable to serve due to contracting COVID-19 between March 9, 2020, and June 30, 2021.

“Since the darkest days of the pandemic, our first responders — police officers, firefighters, and EMS workers alike — have been on the ground, putting their own

health and safety at risk to protect others,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “When our first responders are disabled on the job, they deserve comprehensive benefits. HB 3162, a bipartisan Act-of-Duty Bill, ensures they get the benefits they are entitled to.”

“Our first responders serve and protect, heal and care, comfort and support, Illinois residents in their time of greatest need,” said Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton. “During the pandemic they continued to answer the call, many at great cost to themselves and their families. This law will provide them with full disability benefits they deserve for the selfless sacrifice they have made on behalf of the people of Illinois.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic gripped our nation in the early months of 2020, first responders jumped into action assisting the sick, dispersing testing kits, transporting infected patients to the hospital, and more. When officers contracted the virus themselves, even after taking precautions and wearing PPE, they often needed to be hospitalized and many were left without the salary and healthcare coverage they needed. For the past three years, COVID-19 was the leading cause of law enforcement deaths - far surpassing firearm and traffic-related deaths.

"Chicago police and firefighters should not have to die to qualify for full COVID disability benefits. And that was the unfortunate message the city's pension disability board was sending with its rulings against my brother and Officer Diana Cordova-Nestad – and the other first responders disabled by COVID in the days before vaccines were available who are waiting to go before the board," Comptroller Susana A. Mendoza said. "That's unforgivable. I can't thank everyone enough - my sponsors, Representative Hoffman and Senator Cunningham, legislators, and Governor Pritzker, for fixing this injustice for my brother and all our first responders."

“Our first responders put their lives on the line to ensure we could rely on emergency services in the darkest days of the pandemic,” Assistant Majority Leader Jay Hoffman (D-Belleville). “The least we can do is make sure they receive the benefits they are rightly owed. I am appreciative of the strong advocacy on this topic from Comptroller Mendoza, first responders and lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.”

“Today, we have taken a significant step towards recognizing the sacrifices of Chicago police and firefighters who have suffered from the long-term effects of COVID-19,” said State Senator Bill Cunningham (D-Chicago). “This action puts Chicago police and fire in parity with the rest of the state by giving them access to the full disability benefits they deserve.”

The Illinois Works Jobs Program Act has already been revised to ensure that families of the COVID-19's fallen first responders receive their benefits. The Act-of-Duty Bill furthers this initiative, giving those who were disabled due to the virus the benefits that they deserve.

Since the onset of the pandemic, more than 100 million Americans have been infected with COVID-19 and more than one million of those were left with long-term COVID-related disabilities.

"I am proud to stand with Comptroller Mendoza in support of our police officers and firefighters across the state. This legislation provides Chicago police officers and firefighters with the same COVID-19 disability benefits as our officers and firefighters in downstate Illinois," said Deputy Republican Leader Norine Hammond (R-Macomb). "These brave officers and firefighters who fell ill and were injured in the line of duty deserve our utmost support and with today's action, they will finally receive the financial support they've earned. We cannot thank them enough for their service to the people of Illinois."

"In the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, our first responders put their lives on the line to ensure the health and safety of our communities. Now when they need us, we need to be there for them," said Assistant Majority Leader Natalie Manley. "By including the rebuttable presumption for first responders who have become disabled as a result of COVID-19, we are correcting a great injustice and ensuring that our first responders have the resources they need to live fulfilling lives."

"While most of us were at home during COVID trying to protect ourselves, our police and firemen were in the midst of the virus, serving on the frontlines to serve and protect our communities," said Senator Dale Fowler (R-Harrisburg). "It's incredibly important we support them through this legislation, because they are the everyday heroes of our communities, and they shouldn't have to stress about compensation in an event of a COVID exposure leading to a disability."

"As a strong advocate for our law enforcement officials, I'm proud to continue supporting them by ensuring they receive the benefits they deserve," said State Senator Meg Loughran Cappel (D-Shorewood). "We have to continue prioritizing the men and women who protect our communities."

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