

By: Representative Ford (54th)

To: Public Health and Human Services; Appropriations A

## HOUSE BILL NO. 154

1       AN ACT TO CREATE THE "HELPING HEROES ACT" TO PROVIDE SUPPORT  
2 TO ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER, FIREFIGHTER OR PUBLIC EMS  
3 PERSONNEL WHO IS DIAGNOSED WITH PTSD BY A MENTAL HEALTH  
4 PROFESSIONAL DURING HIS OR HER NORMAL COURSE OF DUTY; TO PROVIDE  
5 DEFINITIONS; TO PROVIDE THAT AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO PURSUING  
6 WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS, UPON A DIAGNOSIS OF PTSD, A FIRST  
7 RESPONDER OR PUBLIC EMS PERSONNEL SHALL BE ENTITLED TO  
8 REIMBURSEMENT FOR PAID MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND UP TO THIRTY  
9 DAYS OF PAID TIME OFF; TO PROVIDE THAT THE TREATMENT AND PAID TIME  
10 OFF FOR EACH ELIGIBLE FIRST RESPONDER OR PUBLIC EMS PERSONNEL  
11 SHALL NOT EXCEED \$7,500.00 PER PERSON ANNUALLY; TO PROVIDE THAT  
12 THE TREATMENT AND PAID TIME OFF SHALL BE PAID THROUGH THE  
13 INSURANCE PREMIUM TAX REVENUE COLLECTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF  
14 REVENUE; TO CREATE A SPECIAL FUND IN THE STATE TREASURY TO BE  
15 KNOWN AS THE "HELPING HEROES ACT FUND"; TO PROVIDE THE REPORTING  
16 REQUIREMENTS OF THE FUND; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

17       BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

18       SECTION 1. The provisions of this act shall be known and may  
19 be cited as the "Helping Heroes Act".

20       SECTION 2. (1) For the purposes of this section, the  
21 following words and phrases shall have the meanings as defined  
22 herein unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

23               (a) "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)" shall have  
24 the same definition as the definition provided by the National  
25 Institute of Mental Health and is caused by an event or events

26 occurring in the course and scope of the first responders and  
27 public emergency medical services (EMS) personnel official duty  
28 employment.

29 (b) "Law enforcement officer" means any officer who has  
30 been certified by the Mississippi Board on Law Enforcement Officer  
31 Standards and Training and has ten (10) or more years of service.

32 (c) "Firefighter" means any firefighter who has ten  
33 (10) or more years of service and is employed by the State of  
34 Mississippi, or any political subdivision thereof, on a full-time  
35 duty status, and any firefighter who has ten (10) or more years of  
36 service and is registered with the State of Mississippi, or a  
37 political subdivision thereof, on a volunteer firefighting status.

38 (d) "Public EMS personnel" means a licensed certified  
39 paramedic, emergency medical technician or emergency medical  
40 responder who is employed by the State of Mississippi or a  
41 political subdivision of the state on a full-time basis.

42 (e) "First responder" means any firefighter and law  
43 enforcement officer as defined in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this  
44 subsection.

45 (2) Any law enforcement officer, firefighter or public EMS  
46 personnel who is diagnosed with PTSD by a mental health  
47 professional during his or her normal course of duty shall be  
48 presumed to have a disease or infirmity connected to work-related  
49 service as a first responder. A licensed mental health  
50 professional that may be used to diagnose and treat PTSD shall

51 include a clinical social worker, licensed professional mental  
52 health counselor, psychologist, psychiatric nurse, nurse  
53 practitioner and psychiatrist. The mental health professionals  
54 that may be used to diagnose and treat PTSD may have different  
55 training, credentials or licenses.

56 (3) As an alternative to pursuing workers' compensation  
57 benefits, upon a diagnosis of PTSD, a first responder or public  
58 EMS personnel shall be entitled to the following benefits:

59 (a) Reimbursement for paid mental health services; and  
60 (b) Up to thirty (30) days of paid time off provided  
61 the date of disability occurs on or after the first responder's  
62 effective date of coverage, a disability benefit payable as a  
63 result of the PTSD.

64 (4) (a) The treatment and paid time off authorized under  
65 subsection (3) for each eligible first responder or public EMS  
66 personnel shall not exceed Seven Thousand Five Hundred Dollars  
67 (\$7,500.00) per person annually.

68 (b) Beginning with fiscal year 2026, the Department of  
69 Revenue shall annually deposit from insurance premium tax revenue  
70 collected by it under the provisions of Section 27-15-103 et seq.  
71 an amount of Two Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$200,000.00) for each  
72 fiscal year into the special fund created in Section 3 of this  
73 act.

74 (5) A PTSD diagnosis that arises solely from a legitimate  
75 personnel action such as a transfer, promotion, demotion or  
76 termination shall not be a compensable injury.

77 (6) Nothing in this section shall modify the qualifications  
78 necessary to establish eligibility to receive benefits or the  
79 calculation of benefits to be paid under Public Employment  
80 Retirement System (PERS).

81        **SECTION 3.** (1) There is created in the State Treasury a  
82 special fund to be known as the "Helping Heroes Act Fund." The  
83 fund shall consist of monies deposited therein as provided under  
84 Section 2 of this act, monies appropriated by act of the  
85 Legislature and monies from any other source designated for  
86 deposit into such fund. Unexpended amounts remaining in the fund  
87 at the end of a fiscal year shall not lapse into the State General  
88 Fund, and any interest earned or investment earnings on amounts in  
89 the fund shall be deposited to the credit of the fund.



99           **SECTION 4.** This act shall take effect and be in force from  
100 and after July 1, 2025.

