

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.



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

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

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

(2) The Commissioner of Insurance shall file an annual report with the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chair of the House Insurance Committee and the Chair of the Senate Insurance Committee. The report shall contain a detailed explanation of how the funds have been used to help first responders and public EMS personnel who have been diagnosed with PTSD, how many first responders and public EMS personnel have been helped, and whether more funds are needed.



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

