



Pennsylvania  
**Emergency Management Agency**



Pennsylvania  
**Office of the  
State Fire Commissioner**

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## **Shapiro-Davis Administration Invests in First Responder Health, Pushes to Expand Coverage During Disasters**

*Shapiro-Davis Administration highlights Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) coverage for first responders.*

*Governor Shapiro's 2026-27 budget proposal seeks to expand workers compensation coverage to first responders responding to support the state during disaster emergencies.*

**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, **Lt. Governor Austin Davis**, **Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Director Randy Padfield**, and **State Fire Commissioner Tom Cook** highlighted the new law **Governor Shapiro** signed to strengthen access to mental health care for firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, and state police officers and advocated for **Governor Shapiro's** budget proposal, which will further expand worker protections for first responders.

“Pennsylvania’s first responders face difficult and often traumatic situations to keep us safe. With Act 121, we made it clear that their mental health matters just as much as their physical health,” said **Lt. Gov. Austin Davis**. “Governor Shapiro and I will continue working to make sure these heroes who answer the call know their Commonwealth stands behind them, and we will always be grateful for the lifesaving work they do.”

In 2024, the Commonwealth reformed the Workers’ Compensation Act to ensure firefighters, first responders, and law enforcement with a post-traumatic stress injury get the coverage they deserve. Nearly [one in seven](#) first responders suffer from PTSI.

However, if a disaster emergency is declared and first responders are called to duty, they are not provided death or worker’s compensation benefits from the Commonwealth. Governor Shapiro’s [2026-27 budget](#) proposes to expand workers’ rights once again and make any first responder deployed by the Commonwealth in accordance with a Governor’s Emergency Declaration eligible for death and workers' compensation benefits while responding to a disaster.

“First responders routinely face traumatic situations most people will never experience,” said **State Fire Commissioner Tom Cook**. “Ensuring they have timely access to post-traumatic stress injury care is essential, not just for their own health, but for their families, and the strength and readiness of our entire emergency response system.”

“This law sends a clear message that the mental health of firefighters and first responders matters,” said **Bob Brooks, President of the Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association**. “For too long, many have carried the invisible weight of the job in silence. Recognizing post-traumatic stress as a legitimate workplace injury is a meaningful step toward ensuring these men and women receive the care, understanding, and support they deserve. We’re grateful for the leadership of Governor Shapiro and the Pennsylvania General Assembly in helping make this long-overdue change a reality.”

[Act 121 of 2024](#) allows first responders to receive workers’ compensation benefits for post-traumatic stress injuries caused by qualifying traumatic events experienced in the line of duty. A PTSD does not need to result from an unusual or abnormal work condition to be covered. The benefits may be provided for up to two years and must be supported by a diagnosis from a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist. Claims must be filed within three years of diagnosis, and coverage applies even if the diagnosis occurs after employment ends, as long as the trauma happened on the job.

“Removing the abnormal working condition criteria for first responders diagnosed with PTSD as a result of their job duties had been a top priority for me since I joined the legislature” said **state Rep. Jennifer O’Mara**, who authored Act 121. “As the daughter of a firefighter who died by gun suicide due to PTSD, I know the steep toll these jobs take on mental health. There is nothing normal about the tragedies these heroes witness every day.”

“As a former PEMA employee and mental health advocate, I wholeheartedly support investments in crisis counseling and mental health treatment for first responders,” said **state Rep. Justin Fleming**. “I’m proud to have played a role in advocating for the passage of Act 121 of 2024, to make it easier for first responders to get the PTSD care they need.”

The **Shapiro-Davis Administration** wants to expand protections to first responders in the [2026-27 budget proposal](#) by adding state workers compensation coverage to these responders when they are serving on behalf of the Commonwealth during a declared disaster.

“When first responders are deployed on behalf of the Commonwealth during a state-declared disaster emergency, they deserve the same protections as any state employee,” said **PEMA Director Randy Padfield**. “Guaranteeing workers’ compensation coverage when they are working on behalf of the Commonwealth ensures responders and their families are protected, supported, and never left to bear the cost of service alone should they be hurt.”

Currently, when the Commonwealth requests specialized resources or teams to respond to a disaster on behalf of the state, workers' compensation coverage for non-state personnel remains the responsibility of the providing organization, such as a local municipality or private service. In some cases, this coverage may be inadequate or may not apply when those resources are deployed for state missions, creating potential gaps in protection for first responders serving on behalf of Pennsylvania.

**Governor Shapiro's** 2026-27 budget proposal aims to ensure Pennsylvania first responders are adequately covered in the unfortunate event they are injured while helping their neighbors when the state calls on them to respond.

For more information about the PTSI law and how to access services, visit the [OSFC Health & Wellness resources page](#). If you or a loved one need immediate support with a behavioral health issue, call or text 988 for the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or visit [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) to chat with a trained crisis counselor.

Learn more about the **Shapiro-Davis Administration's** efforts to support Pennsylvanians in the [Governor's 2026-27 budget](#).

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