Democrats and Republicans. It awaits its first hearing in the House Committee on Education and Labor.

If passed, HR 1629 won't automatically incorporate dispatchers into SB 542. According to legislative aides in Stern's Sacramento office, the state also would need to make a comparable amendment to its occupation code. Alternately, SB 542 would need to change during its approval process.

Nonetheless, the dispatchers appreciate progress—as do their colleagues, who see them as more than clerical staff, their current designation.

"The reality is dispatchers should be classified as public safety personnel," Alexander said. "[As a dispatcher] you hear these things, you're living through these people's traumatic things, and the line will just die [when] it gets turned over to us arriving on the scene....

"I probably get a small wisp of what those dispatchers are having to handle."

Calling SB 542 "a great step in the

right direction," Alexander said he "100 percent supports the bill." State law enforcement and firefighter groups formally endorse its

Follow the progress: Visit tinyurl.com/SB542 for the status and details of California Senate Bill 542, relating to workers' compensation for first responders, and tinyurl.com/HR1629 for House Resolution 1629, the 911 SAVES Act

passage. Most opposition comes from public employer groups such as the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties.

While PTSD already gets considered for workers' compensation, Parrott said, changing this mental health diagnosis to a presumptive condition "obviously is a benefit to us." The burden of proof shifts to the employer, refuting the claim, over the employee, validating the claim.

"The difficult issue we face is the time it takes to get that diagnosis," Parrot continued. "These sort of problems don't present immediately; sometimes they're delayed, depending on the accumulated trauma.

"If this legislation somehow streamlines that [process], that's going to work to our benefit.... And if this just lends itself even to an inertia toward a more serious look at the mental health impacts of the job, then I think we're going in the right direction."

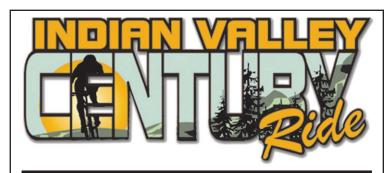




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