
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 230
Author: Laird (D), et al.
Amended: 8/20/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE LABOR, PUB. EMP. & RET. COMMITTEE: 5-0, 3/26/25
AYES: Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Cortese, Durazo, Laird

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0, 4/1/25 (Consent)
AYES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Reyes

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 9/3/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Workers' compensation: firefighters

SOURCE: California Professional Firefighters

DIGEST: This bill, for injuries occurring on or after January 1, 2026, expands rebuttable presumptions that specified diagnoses are occupational and therefore covered by workers' compensation to active firefighting members of a fire department that serve a United States Department of Defense (DOD) installation, a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) installation, and provide fire protection to a commercial airport, as specified.

Assembly Amendments specify this bill applies to injuries occurring on or after January 1, 2026.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes a comprehensive system of workers' compensation that provides a range of benefits for an employee who suffers from an injury or illness that arises out of and in the course of employment, regardless of fault. This system requires all employers to insure payment of benefits by either securing the consent of the Department of Industrial Relations to self-insure or by obtaining insurance from a company authorized by the state. (Labor Code §§3200-6002)
- 2) Creates a series of rebuttable presumptions of an occupational injury for peace and safety officers for the purpose of the workers' compensation system. These presumptions include: heart disease, hernias, pneumonia, cancer, tuberculosis, blood-borne infectious disease or methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* skin infection (MRSA), bio-chemical illness, and meningitis. The compensation awarded for these injuries must include full hospital, surgical, medical treatment, disability indemnity, and death benefits, as provided by workers' compensation law. (Labor Code §§3212-3213.2)
- 3) Provides, until January 1, 2029, a rebuttable presumption that a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) injuries for specified peace officers and firefighters is an occupational injury. The benefit includes full hospital, surgical, medical treatment, disability indemnity, and death benefits, but only applies to peace officers who have served at least six months. (Labor Code §3212.15)

This bill:

- 1) For injuries occurring on or after January 1, 2026, expands the rebuttable presumptions for heart disease, hernias, pneumonia, tuberculosis, blood-borne infectious disease or MRSA, bio-chemical illness, and meningitis to all of the following active firefighting members of:
 - a) A fire department that serves a DOD installation and is certified by the DOD as meeting its standards for firefighters.
 - b) A fire department that serves a NASA installation and adheres to training standards established in accordance with specified Health and Safety Code provisions.
 - c) A fire department that provides fire protection to a commercial airport regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and is trained and certified by the State Fire Marshall, as specified.

- 2) For injuries occurring on or after January 1, 2026, expands the rebuttable presumptions for cancer and post-traumatic stress disorder injuries to active firefighting members of a fire department that provides fire protection to a commercial airport, as specified.

Background

Workers' Compensation Presumptions. The Legislature has created disputable or rebuttable presumptions within the workers' compensation system, which shifts the burden of proof in an injury claim from the employee to the employer. If an injury is covered by a presumption, the employer, in most cases, carries a larger burden to prove the injury is not related to work. For certain occupations, such as firefighters and peace officers, where employees can be exposed to more types of injuries than in other occupations, the law provides presumptions for injury and illness more likely to be caused by work-related exposure.

Currently, some firefighters have rebuttable presumptions that the following diagnoses are occupational injuries for purposes of workers' compensation coverage:

- Heart disease, hernias, pneumonia,
- Cancer,
- Post-traumatic stress disorder injuries (PTSI)¹
- Tuberculosis,
- Blood-borne infectious disease or MRSA
- Bio-chemical illness
- Meningitis

Under existing law, active firefighting members of a fire department that provides fire protection to a NASA installation, or DOD installation have rebuttable presumptions only for cancer and PTSI. This bill proposes to extend the full list of rebuttable presumptions - heart disease, hernias, pneumonia, tuberculosis, MRSA, bio-chemical illness, and meningitis – that are occupational injuries to these firefighters.

When originally created, the presumption of cancer as an occupational injury was only extended to city, county, city and county, and municipal fire departments, as well as the University of California and the California State University fire departments. Over time, this exemption has been extended to additional groups of

¹ For purposes of this analysis, post-traumatic stress disorder injuries and PTSI will be used interchangeably.

firefighters, including fire departments on DOD installations (SB 1271, 2008), and then to firefighters at NASA (SB 585, 2011).

The table below shows which firefighter workers' compensation presumptions exist in current law.

Workers' Compensation Presumptions	DOD Firefighters	NASA Firefighters	Commercial airport Firefighters
Heart, hernia, pneumonia ²	No	No	No
Cancer ³	<i>Included</i>	<i>Included</i>	No
Post- traumatic disorder injuries (PTSI) ⁴	<i>Included</i>	<i>Included</i>	No
Tuberculosis ⁵	No	No	No
Blood-borne disease & MRSA ⁶	No	No	No
Biochemical ⁷	No	No	No
Meningitis ⁸	No	No	No

This bill proposes to expand all of the existing workers' compensation presumptions, as shown in the table above, to firefighters at DOD, NASA, and commercial airports, as defined.

According to the author and sponsors, closing the gap on the workers' compensation presumptions for firefighters employed at NASA, DOD installations, and at commercial airports will cover about 538 additional firefighters (452 working at the DOD and NASA, and 86 covering the airports).

Although firefighters at a commercial airport are not included in any of the existing rebuttable presumption protections, these firefighters were included in the rebuttable presumptions for COVID-19, which expired on January 1, 2024.

[NOTE: See the Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee analysis for detailed background on this bill.]

² Labor Code §3212

³ Labor Code §3212.1

⁴ Labor Code §3212.15

⁵ Labor Code §3212.6

⁶ Labor Code §3212.8

⁷ Labor Code §3212.85

⁸ Labor Code §3212.9

Prior/Related Legislation

SB 623 (Laird, Chapter 621, Statutes of 2023) extended the sunset until January 1, 2029 for a rebuttable presumption that a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder injuries for specified peace officers and firefighters is an occupational injury, and required the Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation to submit both reports to the Legislature analyzing the effectiveness of the presumption and a review of claims filed by specified types of employees not included in the presumption, such as public safety dispatchers, as defined.

AB 699 (Weber, 2023) would have extended rebuttable presumptions for hernia, pneumonia, heart trouble, cancer, tuberculosis, blood-borne infectious disease, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* skin infection, and meningitis-related illnesses and injuries to a lifeguard employed on a year-round, full-time basis in the Boating Safety Unit by the City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department, as specified. It would also have expanded the presumptions for post-traumatic stress disorder or exposure to biochemical substances, as defined, to a lifeguard employed in the Boating Safety Unit by the City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department. *This bill was vetoed.*

AB 597 (Rodriguez, 2023) would have, for injuries occurring on or after January 1, 2025, created a rebuttable presumption for emergency medical technicians and paramedics that PTSI is an occupational injury and covered under workers' compensation. *This bill was held in the Assembly Insurance Committee.*

SB 284 (Stern, 2022) would have expanded the existing PTSI rebuttable presumption to specified public first responders. *This bill was vetoed.*

SB 1159 (Hill, Chapter 85, Statutes of 2020) created a rebuttable presumption for specified employees, including active firefighting members of a fire department that provides fire protection to a commercial airport, as defined, that illness or death resulting from COVID-19 under specified circumstances, and until January 1, 2023, is an occupational injury and therefore covered by workers' compensation.

SB 542 (Stern, Chapter 390, Statutes of 2019) created the rebuttable presumption for specified peace officers that a diagnosis of PTSI is occupational and therefore covered by workers' compensation.

SB 585 (Fong, Chapter 550, Statutes of 2011) extended the rebuttable presumption that cancer is an occupational injury and covered by workers' compensation to

active firefighting members of a fire department serving a NASA installation who adhere to specified training standards.

SB 1271 (Cedillo, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2008) extended the rebuttable presumption of cancer as an occupational injury for firefighters to firefighters on DOD installations.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/3/25)

California Professional Firefighters (Source)
Burbank Airport Professional Firefighters Local I-16
Burbank Airport Professional Firefighters, Local #i-61
California Federation of Labor Unions
California Labor Federation
Moffett Field Firefighters Association Local I-79
NASA JPL Professional Firefighters Local I-94

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/3/25)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:

According to the sponsors, the California Professional Firefighters:
“Firefighters and other public safety employees work in dangerous, demanding jobs for the public good, risking their lives each day protecting their communities. The nature of their work is such that certain injuries and illnesses are more likely contracted on the job than that of other professions, oftentimes with catastrophic or deadly consequences. It is on account of these dangers and many others that over the course of the last 40 years lawmakers have established rebuttable presumptions in the workers’ compensation system to improve access to care for injured workers, allow them to more efficiently adjudicate their claims, and successfully return to the job they love. Additionally, presumptions serve to streamline these claims and reduce frictional costs within the system. The protections provided by workers’ compensation presumptions are invaluable to the firefighters that are impacted by job-caused illnesses. When diagnosed with a serious illness such as cancer or heart disease, the most important focus should be on treatment and recovery, not struggling to have a workers’ compensation claim approved. Unfortunately, not all California firefighters are extended these critical protections. Firefighters who are

employed at Department of Defense installations, airports, and NASA facilities are not included in most, and in some cases, all of the Labor Code sections that establish the presumptions, leaving them vulnerable to cruel denials when they are stricken with the same illnesses as their brothers and sisters throughout the state.”

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9/3/25 18:38:08

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