

Tom Kuroski
President, Newtown Federation of Teachers

Re: Meeting with Legislative Leaders on January 17, 2013

Dear President Kuroski,

You asked for a summary of our meeting with the legislative leaders from the General Assembly last Thursday.

Let me start off by saying how honored I am to be representing your members. The courage and devotion in which they approach their duties is unparalleled. My office and I will do everything we can to see that your members get the benefits they will need as they try to move forward from the tragedy they have endured.

Attendees:

Present was the Speaker of the House of Representatives as well as both the Majority and Minority Leaders of the General Assembly as well as one or two other legislators. With them were their respective legislative staff members. Also present were leaders representing AFSCME, Council 15 (Police), Volunteer Firefighters, State Police and one or two other representatives from other employee groups whom I did not get the chance to meet.

Goal of the Meeting:

The legislative leaders called this meeting to see what needs existed for the employees impacted by the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. They solicited input from the group so that they could learn what could be done and what they could do to help.

Recommendations:

As you may recall, you raised the issue of counseling and coverage for teachers who needed to remove themselves from the classroom for varying periods of time. There was discussion regarding the coordination of services for teachers who need them. The legislative leaders stated that US Senator Lieberman would be playing a part in expediting and coordinating services for your members.

One of the themes of the meeting was how best to get effected teachers the medical/ mental health benefits they will need as well as the time away from work in order to begin the healing process. Much of my remarks focused on creating a mechanism analogous to workers compensation. This involves legislative action that would recognize post-traumatic stress disorder as an occupational illness for which benefits are due.

The legislators stated that workers compensation insurance carriers could not be made to insure for such an illness retroactively. While this is true, my response was that a statute can and should be passed which recognizes PTSD as an occupational illness for those who suffer from the disease as a result of their experience at Sandy Hook Elementary. Payment for those benefits would need to be funded by a mechanism other than workers' compensation insurance.

Attendees at the meeting discussed funds that presently exist by way of charitable contributions as well as federal and state funding to pay for such benefits. The legislators

agreed that the most efficient way to ensure that people who are or will be suffering from PTSD and associated illnesses would be to guarantee that these people get benefits as though it would be covered under workers' compensation. It was my feeling that the lawmakers would pass such a statute at their legislative session scheduled for this Wednesday, January 23, 2013.

Going Forward:

If the legislators take our advice and act as they seemed inclined to do, your members who need or will need help because they suffer or will suffer from PTSD or associated mental health illnesses will get that help as though it were covered under workers' compensation law. So what does that mean? In a nutshell, anyone getting treatment or who will need it should be availing himself or herself of that treatment. Under workers' compensation a referral is typically, but not always, required from a primary care physician. Missed time from work that is a result of treatment or is the result of the illness is not sick time. Rather, it is coded as workers' compensation time and the employee is paid a rate of pay that is customarily 66% of ones pay during the missed time. Many public employers allow employees who are out from work on workers compensation to take the equivalent of 33% of a sick day so that the worker does not experience a decrease in pay. Additionally, there are no co-pays for treatment of an occupational disease. That includes doctor visits, prescriptions, deductibles, etc. And finally, under workers' compensation law, treatment is made available for as long as the effected worker and her/his doctor say it is needed. Your members are sure to face unthinkable obstacles in their recovery. These obstacles are sure to be there for quite some time. The treatment they will need going forward does not expire.

If there is anything else that I can do for you or your members, please do not hesitate to contact me. The legislature will be taking this up in the next couple of days. I will surely keep you up to date as will the AFTCT President, Melodie Peters and AFTCT Lobbyist, Jennifer Berigan.

Sincerely,

Eric W. Chester