

OPPOSITION OF HB334

Greetings - thank you for allowing me to express my views in reference to HOUSE BILL 334.

My name is James R. Pontrelli – I am a Republican and I was born, raised and currently live in Missoula.

I have served the citizens of Missoula and I have been employed by the Missoula Police Department for the last 23 years. I am a sworn police officer assigned to the traffic unit and drive a motorcycle daily, enforcing laws and responding to calls for service from the community. I love my career and don't plan to retire any time soon.

I have damaged almost every part of my body on the "altar" of police work fighting "Good vs. Evil" - attempting to make my community a better place to live. I am standing before you because WORKERS' COMPENSATION has provided the means to make me whole after all of my bodily sacrifice.

One of my injuries resulted from responding to a vehicle crash emergency call. The injury required a surgical C-5-C-6 lumbar fusion. To this day, I still suffer headaches and require occasional treatment involving doctor visits and medication and -yes Workers' Compensation pays the bill.

Under this new bill, if this injury were to occur after July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, I would be covered medically for only five years since the injury is not a total disabling and permanent injury. In other words, after five years, I will be on my own or hoping my insurance will cover me. We all know the chances of a private insurance company covering a PRE-EXISTING CONDITION.....IT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN.

If I am hurt and cannot return to work as a police officer, and do not have the mandatory and impossibly high impairment, Workers' Compensation is done with me- I lose my career. Workers' Compensation will not provide me the opportunity or the funding to get retrained in another career field and five years later, I wouldn't receive any further help with medical.... in other words, this bill is running away from the intended purpose that Workers' Compensation was originally put in place for- putting injured workers back into the workforce, allowing them to remain working, productive, tax-paying members of the community.

Lawmakers, my plea to you is simple....please consider the serious ramifications of this bill. You are attempting to chop the existing law into practically nothing, and that serves no one. Workers' Compensation is in place to help injured Montana workers return to the workplace. Be careful, because it appears to me that the only thing you may be chopping is you or your own family member's benefits by passing this bill. We all have heard the phrase to "protect and serve;" after all, that's what I have based my career on. When I began this career, I took an oath and swore to protect and serve the citizens of my community and of this state. I have done so for over half my life. Now it's time for you, lawmakers, to protect and serve the workers of the great state we all call home... Montana. Please vote NO on HB 334. Thank you for the honor and privilege of speaking to you....

Respectfully submitted,

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