



[Back to News](#) | [Print News](#)

State: Fla.

Second Pulse Responder Files Petition for Benefits: Top [2017-12-01]

An Orlando firefighter who responded to the Pulse Nightclub shooting is the second first responder to file a claim challenging a state law that generally bars claims for mental injuries, while advocates continue to pressure state lawmakers to expand benefits for first responders who suffer PTSD.



Pulse Nightclub

Joshua Granada filed the petition on Tuesday, one week after the Orlando Fire Department terminated him for audiotaping what he called a “belligerent” patient who turned out to be City Councilwoman Regina Hill. Firefighters responding to a hotel penthouse found Hill unresponsive and revived her, News 6 reported.

Granada, his attorney and the Orlando Professional Fire Fighters IAFF Local 1365 are fighting to get him reinstated.

Granada told reporters in Orlando that his firing stems from harassment he says began after the June 12, 2016, Pulse shooting that killed 49. The firefighter-paramedic says supervisors scolded him after the nightclub shooting for violating department protocol by transporting survivors to a hospital before the area was deemed safe by police.

He is credited with rescuing 13 people and won the Florida State Firefighters’ Association “Firefighter of the Year” award.

Granada is the second first responder to challenge the City of Orlando over a provision of state law that bars claims for mental injuries unaccompanied by physical injury.

Florida law currently allows only medical benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental-mental injuries, although a pair of bills currently in the Senate would provide for lost wages under certain circumstances.

The city offered mental health services under its health insurance plan, said Ashley Papagni, public information manager of the Orlando Fire Department.

“While the specific services provided to any particular firefighter would be confidential under privacy laws, no firefighter was denied mental health services, nor was any firefighter harassed for seeking treatment,” Papagni emailed Thursday.

“Unfortunately, Granada’s actions the night of the Pulse shooting, however heroic, do not justify the illegal recording of a patient receiving medical care — violating their right to privacy,” she said.

Orlando police Officer Gerry Realin also developed PTSD after being part of an eight-member hazmat team that bagged the 49 bodies at the Pulse.

Realin filed a petition for workers' compensation benefits on July 13, 2016, and is scheduled for a final hearing on Dec. 18.

Realin's wife, Jessica, said she will lead a dozen first responder families and widows to Tallahassee for a hearing Tuesday before the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee.

Lawmakers are scheduled to hear Senate Bill 376, legislation recently introduced by Sen. Lauren Book, D-Plantation, to provide lost wages for first responders who have witnessed a murder, suicide, fatal injury or child death, or arrive on a scene where mass casualties occurred.

To be eligible for indemnity benefits, however, first responders would have to have begun mental health treatment within 15 days of the traumatic incident.

"PTSD is a real injury," Jessica Realin said Thursday. "We not only have to fight to get treatment, but we have to battle with the stigma that comes along with it. Unfortunately, a lot of people are not understanding about PTSD. People with cancer or a heart condition get more sympathy. However, if you have PTSD, it's almost as if you're labeled as trying to defraud the system."

Realin said she and the other first responder families will testify at the hearing against SB 376 because of its "restrictive" provisions.

Nearly 9,000 people have signed a petition against SB 376 and in favor of a bill, SB 126, by Sen. Victor Torres, D-Kissimmee. The Torres bill would set the PTSD evidentiary standard at "preponderance of the evidence" versus "clear and convincing" in the other bill, and it would cover first responders for lost wages even if no physical injury occurred.

Realin said the 15-day treatment window in SB 376 is "far too restrictive" because PTSD remains latent in many individuals for extended periods of time.

"There are a lot of reasons this (Torres) legislation is important," Maitland claimants' attorney Geoff Bichler said earlier this month. "We need to put squarely on employers an obligation to provide full coverage for PTSD at the earliest stage.

"Hopefully it will encourage a more proactive assessment of these kinds of problems," said Bichler, who represents Realin and Granada but was unavailable for interview Thursday.

PTSD is so prevalent among firefighters that the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) earlier this year opened its Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C.

Approximately 20% of firefighters and paramedics have PTSD and are six times more likely to attempt suicide, according to IAFF, citing the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology.

A 2015 survey of 1,027 U.S. firefighters found 46.8% had suicidal ideation, 19.2% had made plans to kill themselves and 15.5% had attempted suicide, according to a study by Florida State University.