

August 21, 2018

To the Honorable Members of
The Illinois House of Representatives,
100th General Assembly:

Today I veto House Bill 5221 from the 100th General Assembly, which would make full-time paramedics and firefighters who performs paramedic duties eligible for benefits under the Public Employee Disability Act (PEDA). PEDA entitles injured covered employees to receive their full salary for up to one year as a disability award.

This legislation would operate as an unfunded state mandate on local governments. Expanding PEDA eligibility to additional groups of employees imposes costs on local governments and thus local taxpayers. Local governments should have flexibility to determine benefit and employment conditions for their own employees based on local resources, needs and labor availability. This Bill limits locals' ability to control and curb their operations and spending.

The Workers' Compensation Act (WCA) is a more appropriate remedy for short term compensation of these injured employees. The WCA provides benefits equal to 66 2/3% of the employee's average weekly wage and are normally not considered taxable income. PEDA provides generous benefits to injured employees at 100% of their weekly salary. These benefits may not be considered taxable income under federal law, a situation that would potentially allow PEDA covered employees to effectively increase their take home pay while on a disability award, instead of just replacing it. This creates a perverse financial motivation to fraudulently claim a disability injury, which imposes additional unnecessary costs to taxpayers.

I have the utmost respect for paramedics in Illinois. Their work is extremely taxing and critical to the health and survival of many Illinois citizens and visitors. This Bill, however, puts a significant financial and administrative burden on local governments at a time when most local governments' resources are extremely constrained.

Therefore, pursuant to Section 9(b) of Article IV of the Illinois Constitution of 1970, I hereby return House Bill 5221, entitled "AN ACT concerning government," with the foregoing objections, vetoed in its entirety.

Sincerely,

Bruce Rauner
GOVERNOR