

Below is the latest in a series of articles which DMMC provides for members to “drop in” to their local newsletters or other communications, should they so choose, to inform residents of issues important to municipalities. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Amend the Public Safety Employee Benefits Act

The Public Safety Employee Benefits Act (PSEBA) was created to guarantee health insurance for public safety employees (full-time police officers, correctional and probation officers, and firefighters) who suffer catastrophic injuries while on duty, who cannot continue to work, and who would otherwise lose their medical coverage. Federal statute defines “catastrophic injury” as an injury which makes the employee unable to secure gainful employment. However, in 2003, the Illinois Supreme Court expanded the definition of “catastrophic” by ruling that a duty disability which qualifies for pension benefits is by definition a catastrophic injury, whether or not the employee can be gainfully employed at other occupations.

By failing to follow the federal definition of catastrophic injury, some former public safety employees are receiving taxpayer funded health insurance benefits even when these employees are collecting a disability pension and working a second career through which alternative health insurance is available. Because of this, taxpayers are liable for millions of dollars in lifetime medical benefits for these employees receiving duplicative benefits. Public safety employees facing a truly catastrophic situation and who are unable to secure gainful employment should be given continuing medical coverage. However, the current state law puts an unnecessary burden on taxpayers. Municipalities across DuPage County encourage the General Assembly to preserve the intent of PSEBA by adopting the federal definition of catastrophic injury and limiting awards to cases where benefits are justified.