

(S. B. 78)

(No. 263-2018)

(Approved December 15, 2018)

AN ACT

To amend Section 1.19 of Act No. 20-2017, known as “Puerto Rico Department of Public Safety Act,” in order to grant medical benefits to police officers and firefighters who are honorably discharged due to a physical or mental disability as a result of health conditions or accidents directly related to the performance of their duties or functions, increase the age of service to children age twenty-five (25) or younger who are enrolled in a postsecondary institution; and for other related purposes.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

The members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau have the duty to protect persons and property, maintain and keep law and order, pursue and procure the fullest protection of the civil rights of the citizens, prevent, discover, investigate, and persecute crime and, within the scope of their authority, compel obedience with the laws and municipal ordinances, as well as the regulations promulgated thereunder. Citizens who decide to become police officers voluntarily assume this responsibility; they are a source of honor and pride for our society. Furthermore, the members of the Firefighters Bureau shall have the duty to prevent and fight fires, as well as protect citizens’ lives. Moreover, their daily duties include to answer emergency calls in the event of disasters and hazardous materials spills; review building construction plans; issue fire certifications, deliver fire safety education presentations and orientations; train private companies’ personnel on fire prevention and firefighting techniques, and conduct fire drills, among others.

Our police officers and firefighters risk their health and lives with every step they take in the performance of their duties. This Legislative Assembly recognizes the commendable work performed and sacrifices made by law enforcement officers to ensure the welfare of the general society.

Section 1.19 of Act No. 20-2017, known as the “Puerto Rico Department of Public Safety Act,” imposes on municipalities as well as on all hospitals and clinics of the Government of Puerto Rico the duty to provide, free of charge, appropriate medical care and hospitalization services as well as the necessary medications, as prescribed by a physician for their treatment, to the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the Bureau of the Puerto Rico Firefighters Corps and to their spouses and minor children, or children younger than twenty-one (21) years of age who are enrolled in a postsecondary institution, and to other dependents with disabilities. The aforementioned benefits shall also be applicable to the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the Bureau of the Puerto Rico Firefighters Corps who have retired upon completing twenty-five (25) years or more of honorable service.

The work performed by police officers and firefighters is inherently taxing, stressful, and dangerous. There is always a possibility of suffering a physical or psychological injury that may disable an officer. The members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the Bureau of the Puerto Rico Firefighters Corps who survive a physical or mental disability as a result of an accident or health condition directly related to the performance of their official duties or obligations and retire honorably, are not covered by the protections afforded under Section 1.19 of this Act. We strongly believe that these benefits should be extended to officers who become disabled due to injuries sustained in the performance of their official duties, regardless of their years of service.

This Legislative Assembly deems it fair and meritorious to amend Section 1.19 of Act No. 20-2017, *supra*, in order to extend medical assistance, medication, and hospitalization benefits, free of charge, to police officers and firefighters who became physically or mentally disabled due to health conditions or accidents related to the performance of their duties or functions and were honorably discharged from public service. It is time to reciprocate those who serve Puerto Rico selflessly and pay with their health the price of allowing us to enjoy a prosperous and peaceful society.

This measure also amends the aforementioned Section 1.19, to increase the age of services to children age twenty-five (25) or younger, who are enrolled in a postsecondary institution; thus equating the current parental responsibilities pursuant to law.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PUERTO RICO:

Section 1.- Section 1.19 of Act No. 20-2017, as amended, known as the “Puerto Rico Department of Public Safety Act,” is hereby amended to read as follows:

“Section 1.19.- Municipalities; Assistance and Hospitalization.

It shall be the duty of the municipalities to provide, at their hospitals and free of charge, appropriate medical care and hospitalization services as well as the necessary medications, as prescribed by a physician for their treatment, to the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the Bureau of the Puerto Rico Firefighters Corps and to their spouses and minor children, or children age twenty-one (25) or younger who are enrolled in a postsecondary institution, and other dependents with disabilities. Likewise, all of the hospitals and clinics of the Government of Puerto Rico shall render such services at no cost when so requested by the aforementioned persons and shall dispense prescriptions and issue certifications as are necessary. The benefits provided in this Section shall also be

applicable to the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the Bureau of the Puerto Rico Firefighters Corps who have retired upon completing twenty-five (25) years of honorable service. This provision shall also apply to the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the Bureau of the Puerto Rico Firefighters Corps who honorably retire due to physical or mental disability as a result of an accident or health condition directly related to the performance of their official duties; provided, that they are not engaged for compensation in outside work.

In the event that the persons to whom these benefits are granted are enrolled in a prepaid health insurance plan, the state or municipal institution that provides them with any health care service may bill said health insurance plan for such services rendered, thus exempting the person in question from the payment of the corresponding copayment.”

Section 2.- This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following **Act No. 263-2018 (S. B. 78)** of the **4th Regular Session** of the **18th Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico**:

AN ACT amend Section 1.19 of Act No. 20-2017, known as “Puerto Rico Department of Public Safety Act,” in order to grant medical benefits to police officers and firefighters who are honorably discharged due to a physical or mental disability as a result of health conditions or accidents directly related to the performance of their duties or functions, increase the age of service to children age twenty-five (25) or younger who are enrolled in a postsecondary institution; and for other related purposes.

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, on this 18th day of April, 2022.

Mónica Freire-Florit, Esq.
Director