



Representative Mike Clelland

Florida House of Representatives, District 29

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May 1, 2013

The Honorable Janet H. Adkins
Florida House of Representatives
313 House Office Building
402 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Representative Adkins:

This letter is written in response to your recent request that I publicly apologize for my comments during debate on SB 1410—particularly for remarks made regarding your proposed amendment to the bill (amendment 485525). Your proposed amendment would have required all firefighters, including female firefighters, to keep their Body Mass Index (BMI) at or below 25, or lose their firefighter certification, and therefore, lose their jobs. As you know, your amendment was rejected, with a number of Representatives expressing concern about inherent flaws in the BMI rating system which doesn't correctly calculate the fitness of an individual, particularly those who are muscular. Apparently, you have taken issue with my recitation of fact, which is that women generally have higher BMIs than men. This is not a fact that is really up for debate as the Center for Disease Control (CDC), as well as countless studies, show this to be true. As you get to know me better, you will find that I research topics before discussing them in debate.

But let's be clear, my comments were in no way intended to, and did not otherwise, "disparage" women, and I take great offense to that suggestion. In fact, my comments were intended to protect all firefighters, including women, from your amendment, which—while I am sure was well-intended—failed to consider numerous, significant issues the good men and women in fire service face during the course of their careers. During my 26 years of service as a firefighter, I worked very closely with many firefighters, both men and women. Many of the firefighters I worked with, both men and women, were in tremendous physical shape, and very muscular. I am certain that many of these dedicated men and women would have had higher BMIs than you would expect, despite their physical appearance. Being in excellent physical shape should not preclude an individual from fire service based on a flawed BMI rating system. Your amendment provided no protection for those who had higher BMIs based on being physically fit. In addition,

*Civil Justice Subcommittee, Criminal Justice Subcommittee
Economic Affairs Committee, Ethics & Elections Subcommittee
Joint Select Committee on Collective Bargaining
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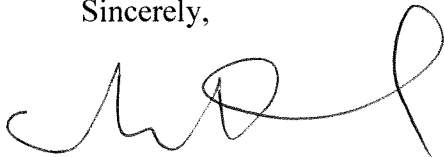
I worked with many men and women who suffered serious injury protecting the people and property of this State. As a result, they were unable to work or exercise during their recovery, or given medications, such as steroids, that caused them to gain weight. Certainly those men and women who sacrificed their bodies to protect the people and property of this State should not have their certification stripped because their BMI increased for reasons beyond their control. Your amendment provided no protection for those who had higher BMIs based on being physically fit or due to injury.

Aside from the foregoing, and more importantly, your amendment would have harmed, and discriminated against, the many women in fire service who want to start families. I do not think that anyone would disagree that a woman's BMI is increased during pregnancy. I cannot, in good conscience, support an amendment such as yours that had no language within it to protect these good women in fire service who want to exercise their fundamental right to start a family.

In closing, I agree with your sentiment that it is a tremendous honor to serve in the Florida House of Representatives, and that we must measure up to the integrity and character of the citizens who elected us to serve. However, I feel no need to apologize for any comments made during debate, as they were factual, and intended to protect the men and women in fire service who would have been harmed by the language in your amendment.

I likewise look forward to working with you and other members to improve the health, safety and well-being of Florida's Professional Firefighters. However, any measures to do so should be researched and thought out thoroughly before being brought to the House for consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Clelland', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Clelland
State Representative
House District 29

cc: Speaker Will Weatherford
House Democratic Leader Perry Thurston
Members, Florida House of Representatives