



*International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO, CLC*

Testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice
and Human Rights: *Bill C-32, An Act to Amend the
Criminal Code and Other Acts*

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Good afternoon,

My name is Jim Lee, and I am the Assistant to the General President for Canadian Operations for the International Association of Fire Fighters. I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here, on behalf of our General President Harold Schaitberger and the 18,400 professional fire fighters we represent in Canada, to provide our position on Bill C-32, *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code and Other Acts*.

I will preface my remarks by noting that they are limited to that section of the bill that deals with the Setting a Trap provisions of the *Criminal Code*. Having said that, I'm here to tell you that very simply, the International Association of Fire Fighters supports these particular provisions of Bill C-32 100 per cent.

We commend the Minister of Justice for listening to our arguments and acting forcefully to address a serious and growing safety threat to Canada's professional fire fighters.

Bill C-32, as you know, will amend the existing *Criminal Code* provisions for Setting a Trap, found in Section 247, indeed building upon those provisions with tough, new punishments that directly address the setting of traps inside illegal drug operations.

From the current maximum of five years for setting a trap, the bill specifically addresses illegal drug operations by introducing the offence of setting a trap in a place kept for a criminal purpose, with a 10-year possible sentence, which rises sharply to 14 years if bodily harm is caused, and life imprisonment if death results.

Fire fighters support these proposed amendments and it is the position of the IAFF that Bill C-32 does adequately address this particular danger. Bill C-32 when enacted will result in a safer workplace for not only fire fighters, but anyone else who would be in harm's way as a result of these traps.

Police and media in every part of Canada are telling us that the number of illegal drug operations, whether indoor marijuana growing operations hidden inside residential homes, or volatile chemical drug labs, is on the rise in Canada...

Our own members see them almost daily in some parts of the country.

We are hearing that more and more often, it is criminal organizations that are behind these illegal drug operations, and that they will stop at nothing to protect their illicit venture from anyone – including a fire fighter or police officer – who would interfere with that operation.

Just last week, in a Toronto suburb, drug officers entered a residence and found 164 full-grown marijuana plants growing in the basement. They also found a live, seven-foot crocodile in that basement...

One police officer said he didn't think the reptile was being used as security, but I'll let you be the judge of that. I would say that a seven-foot alligator inside a drug house is a security system

with teeth... just like Bill C-32 is a piece of legislation with teeth, as it directly addresses the dangers that fire fighters face when they respond to illegal drug operations.

And I don't mean to make light of this situation, because there have been cases of fire fighters seriously injured, by so-called booby traps at these drug operations. And there have been some close calls as well. I know you will want to know some additional examples, and there is no shortage.

In Kelowna, British Columbia in 1999, a fire fighter received a severe electric shock while responding to a fire at a residence being used as a marijuana operation. Like many of these indoor marijuana operations, it had an illegal hydro bypass... which not only leads to increased risk of fire, but jeopardizes the fire fighters when they respond.

Also in British Columbia, fire fighters responding to a residence that turned out to be a marijuana operation found a crossbow mounted with a tripwire... fortunately, it was not loaded at the time, because it was aimed at chest height.

In Brampton Ontario, a fire fighter was injured after he fell through the floor into the basement of a residence being used as a marijuana grow operation... the floorboards beneath the windows had been cut away, and a carpet was laid over the opening to conceal the danger.

The Canadian Press reported recently that a marijuana field in Nova Scotia was protected by shotguns, again mounted with tripwire, and an individual was actually shot in the leg in that case. There was a similar report of a mounted gun from the Perth, Ontario area a couple of years ago... and these are just a few examples that have come to light...

As I noted there has also been a number of close calls... which leads us to believe that perhaps it will only be a matter of time before there is a tragedy involving a fire fighter. And in that way, we are grateful that Minister Cauchon has taken action on this issue before it happens... before the family of a fire fighter has to deal with the grief of a workplace tragedy that could have been prevented.

Should this legislation be enacted, and we hope it is enacted as soon as possible, those who so callously would place fire fighters in mortal danger, by setting a deadly trap in order to protect their illegal enterprise, will be put on notice that they will face a severe and specific penalty for that criminal act.

There is no doubt in my mind that should this legislation come into force, news of these tougher penalties will spread quickly among those in the drug production business. And I have no doubt that they will think twice before setting a trap to protect their illegal product.

We believe that with the effective deterrents Bill C-32 proposes, there will be fewer of these deadly traps waiting for fire fighters inside illegal drug operations when this legislation is passed... and that means quite frankly, in our belief, that the life of a fire fighter – or fire fighters – will be saved.

In summary, the International Association of Fire Fighters fully supports Bill C-32, which we believe will increase fire fighter safety. We commend Minister Cauchon for acting quickly and decisively on this issue and we support the swift passage of this important legislation.

I thank you again for this opportunity and I would be pleased to answer any questions of the committee.