



IAFF CANADA 2011 LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET:

The Need to Establish a National Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) Benefit in Canada

Background

Fire fighting is a dangerous profession. Studies confirm that those in the profession suffer the highest rate of job-related illness and injury of any occupation, the result of innumerable hazards they encounter every day in the course of protecting the lives and property of Canadians.

On any given call, a fire fighter may be required to enter a burning and damaged structure or other confined space that is choked with toxic smoke, or respond to highway accidents or other medical calls where they can be exposed to infectious diseases. Additionally, several forms of cancer are now recognized as occupational diseases in fire fighters.

Fire fighters are aware of these risks when they choose the profession. Fire fighters are also aware that they are the nation's first line of defense in the event of an attack of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear nature on Canadian soil. Fire fighters are prepared to face these dangers and they are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice without hesitation in order to save the lives of Canadians.

There is no greater example of the sacrifice that fire fighters are prepared to make on behalf of their nation than the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City. When terrorists attacked the United States, it was municipal fire fighters who were first on scene, rushing into the burning, twisted wreckage of the two towers in the hopes that lives might be saved. Sadly, 343 of those fire fighters made the ultimate sacrifice on that fateful day.

As a nation grieved, thoughts turned quickly to their survivors; families who in most cases had lost their primary breadwinner. How would the financial security of these families be protected? Who would ensure they would be able to meet their financial burdens in the wake of these tragic circumstances? In the United States, the federal government has taken a responsible role and since 1976 has administered the Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB). This indexed benefit is immediately available to the families of public safety officers who are killed or disabled in the course of their duties.

The U.S. government did not hide behind jurisdictional arguments when it created the benefit. It recognized that implementing the PSOB was the right thing to do. The benefit is available to all public safety officers, regardless of whether they are employed municipally or federally. First implemented at \$50,000, the benefit was increased to \$250,000 after the events of 9-11 and as of October, 2011 stands at \$323,035.75.

In the past, the Canadian government argued that because most fire fighters are municipally employed, it is up to municipalities to provide some appropriate form of compensation. The truth is that only a minority of professional fire fighters have been able to bargain this kind of benefit, and even so, it is in many cases just a token amount – not nearly enough to realistically address the needs of a grieving family that has lost a major source of income. Among those fire fighters who have been able to negotiate a line of duty death benefit, a typical benefit is two years' continuation of the fire fighter's salary, which is enough to keep the surviving spouse and their family in the family home for two years. Then what?

If a fire fighter dies at age 43 – the average for fireground line-of-duty deaths - even \$300,000 is only about a quarter of the income that the family would have received over the next 17 years if that fire fighter had worked until age 60 at an average salary. Why should the family of a public safety officer who gave their life on behalf of Canadians suffer any financial penalty?

The financial security of the family of a fire fighter who is killed or permanently disabled on behalf of Canadians should not be in question, and it should not depend on the uncertainties of the collective bargaining process or the province in which they live. It is deserving of an equitable national standard; a minimum base amount that would apply to all fire fighters on top of any line of duty death benefit they may be eligible for locally.

During the 38th Session of Parliament, NDP MP Peter Julian (Burnaby – New Westminster, BC) introduced motion M-153 in the House of Commons. M-153 states that in the opinion of the House of Commons, the federal government should establish a national benefit for the families of fallen and permanently disabled fire fighters. M-153 was adopted in the House of Commons by a vote of 161 to 112, demonstrating that a majority of MPs representing a majority of Canadians agree it is appropriate to establish a PSOC benefit for the families of fallen fire fighters. Every year, an overwhelming majority of MPs and Senators from all political parties individually agree with the IAFF at the PSOC benefit should be established, yet the Government of Canada does not act.

This important issue is addressed again in the 41st Parliament. NDP MPs Irene Mathysen and Libby Davies have drafted M-77 and M-100; private members' motions which addresses this important issue. M-100 states:

M-100 — June 6, 2011 — [Ms. Davies \(Vancouver East\)](#) — That, in the opinion of the House, the government should consider establishing a federally-funded Canadian public safety officer compensation fund payable to the survivors of a firefighter, police or public safety officer killed, or permanently disabled, in the line of duty.

The IAFF is prepared to support M-77 and M-100 should they be chosen to proceed in the legislative process and prepared to support any other legislative or bureaucratic initiative that would lead to the establishment of a national PSOC benefit in Canada.

Cost

While money should not be the overriding issue in the discussion about recognizing the sacrifice of fallen fire fighters and ensuring that their families do not face financial hardship, the IAFF agrees that it is fair to consider the question of cost with this issue as it is with any legislative demand. In that regard, a PSOC benefit would cost the Canadian government approximately \$7.5 million annually, based on the current average of 18 fire fighters and seven police officers who die in the line of duty annually in Canada.

IAFF Position

The IAFF calls on the federal government to establish a national Public Safety Officer Compensation benefit in Canada as an appropriate way for the nation to recognize the sacrifice made by a fallen fire fighter and to address the financial security of the fire fighter's family. This benefit should be established in the amount of \$300,000 and function as a direct, indexed benefit to the fire fighter's family.

IAFF Arguments

- ✓ Fire fighters risk their lives and safety every day in the name of protecting Canadians
- ✓ When fire fighters are killed in the line of duty, it is in service to all Canadians
- ✓ Fire fighters are Canada's first line of defense against the aftermath of a terrorist attack
- ✓ The establishment of a national PSOC benefit in Canada would be a fitting way for Canadians to recognize the sacrifice of a fallen fire fighter
- ✓ A national PSOC benefit would enable the family of a fallen fire fighter to face their grief without additional worries about financial security
- ✓ Few of Canada's professional fire fighters have been able to negotiate a meaningful line of duty death benefit at the local level
- ✓ M-153, which was adopted 161-112 in the House of Commons on October 26, 2005, confirms that the majority of parliamentarians representing a majority of Canadians believe the federal government should establish this benefit.

Current Status

Until a national PSOC benefit is established in Canada, the families of the nation's professional fire fighters stand to endure financial hardship in addition to the grief of losing a loved one. It is time for the federal government to act on the need for this benefit and respond to the adoption of M-153 by implementing a national PSOC Benefit in the amount of \$300,000 for the families of Canadian fire fighters killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

For more information about this issue or any other issue affecting Canada's professional fire fighters, visit www.iaff.org/canada or contact the IAFF Canadian Office at (613) 567-8988. The International Association of Fire Fighters represents 298,000 professional fire fighters in North America, including over 21,000 in Canada. The IAFF is affiliated with the AFL-CIO and the Canadian Labour Congress.