

# Fire Fighter and EMS Collective Bargaining Rights

The IAFF strongly supports the Fire Fighters and EMS Employer-Employee Cooperation Act and encourages members of Congress to cosponsor the bill.

## BACKGROUND

Fire and EMS departments benefit from productive partnerships between employers and employees. Studies have shown that communities promoting such cooperation enjoy more effective and efficient delivery of emergency services. Cooperation enables employers and workers to come together to confront difficult budgetary constraints, which proved invaluable as the country recovered from the last economic crisis. The best way to ensure such cooperation is through an established collective bargaining framework. While many fire fighters and EMS personnel already benefit from local collective bargaining laws, there are still many workers that have zero rights or whose laws do not provide adequate protection.

Over the years, Congress has expanded the scope of collective bargaining laws to protect private sector employees, transportation workers, federal government employees and congressional employees. One of the few groups of workers not covered by federal law are state and local government employees, including fire fighters and EMS personnel. While Congress has historically given states and localities wide latitude in managing their own employees, ensuring such personnel have basic collective

bargaining rights is consistent with the increasing role of fire fighters and EMS personnel in protecting our nation's homeland security.

The Fire Fighters and EMS Employer-Employee Cooperation Act would give fire fighters and EMS personnel basic collective bargaining rights in states that currently do not provide them. The legislation gives states wide flexibility to write and administer their own laws, consistent with the following minimum standards:

- The right to form and join a labor organization and to have that organization be recognized through the formation and agreement of a contract.
- The right to bargain over working conditions, hours and wages.
- The ability to resolve disputes through an impasse resolution mechanism, and if an agreement is reached, the right to enforce it in court or through an administrative agency.

The legislation does not allow strikes or lockouts, does not infringe on right-to-work laws and does not interfere with existing state laws and collective bargaining agreements.

## LEGISLATION

**House:** H.R. 2586, the Fire Fighters and EMS Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2021  
Sponsors: Representative Dan Kildee (D-MI); Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)

**Senate:** S. 2178, the Fire Fighters and EMS Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2021  
Sponsor: Senator John Hickenlooper (D-CO)

**Summary:** The Cooperation Act would guarantee fire fighters and emergency medical services personnel basic collective bargaining rights in states that do not currently provide them.