

KEY POINTS

The Cooperation Act enjoys broad bipartisan support while protecting states' rights

- Legislation providing fire fighters and emergency medical responders collective bargaining rights has historically enjoyed broad and bipartisan support in Congress. When last considered by the U.S. House of Representatives in the 110th Congress, such legislation passed 314 to 97, with a majority of each party in favor.
- The bill gives maximum flexibility and ample time for states to craft their own laws, giving fire fighters and EMS personnel the ability to sit down and talk with their employers. The Cooperation Act respects the uniqueness of each state's employment needs and does not allow fire fighters or EMS personnel the right to strike, does not cancel right-to-work laws and does not take away the authority of local jurisdictions to have the final say over public safety decisions.

Collective bargaining helps protect public safety

- The federal government has a vested interest in improving local emergency response operations through adequate staffing, training and equipment to better protect the security of the homeland. Robust and effective homeland security relies in large part on effective local fire and EMS agencies. It is to the benefit and within the ability of the government to ensure such responders can discuss with their employer how to best provide emergency services.
- The ability of fire fighters to talk about their job with employers protects public safety. Collective bargaining has produced measurable staffing, training, equipment and health and safety improvements throughout the nation's fire departments – resulting in safer fire fighters and

improved local emergency response capabilities. Civilian fatality rates for states that do not provide basic collective bargaining rights are, on average, higher than in states that do.

The Cooperation Act is a matter of fairness for public safety

- Fire fighters and emergency medical personnel risk their lives every day to protect the public. They deserve the same rights to discuss workplace issues with their employer that the federal government grants most other workers.
- There is a long history of providing collective bargaining rights to workers. The freedom to assemble is in the first Amendment of the Constitution and part of our Democratic tradition. These rights were further codified over 80 years ago for private sector workers through passage of the National Labor Relations Act; it is only right that those working on the frontlines be treated the same.

The Cooperation Act strengthens public safety retirement and wages

- Due to the dangerous nature of the profession, fire fighters are forced to retire early, putting an emphasis on smart retirement planning. Studies show that employers and employees who engage in collective bargaining result in fair pension contributions producing a more reliable retirement security.
- Collective bargaining can also strengthen earnings while still on the job. Eight of the top 10 states, in terms of disposable income, recognize the right to bargain for public employees. Nine of the bottom 10 states in per capita income do not allow collective bargaining for all public sector workers.