

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 with strong labor-management relations enjoy more effective and efficient delivery of emergency services. Recently, this cooperation enabled employers and workers to confront budgetary constraints, staffing challenges and shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The best way to promote this cooperation is through an established collective bargaining framework. Legislation providing these rights to fire fighters and EMS personnel has long received strong bipartisan support in Congress due to its key role in establishing better staffed, equipped and trained fire departments.

Congress has extended collective bargaining laws to private sector employees, transportation workers and federal government employees. One of the few groups of workers not covered by federal law are state and local government employees – including fire and EMS personnel.

Ensuring fire and EMS personnel have basic collective bargaining rights is consistent with the increasing role of fire fighters and EMS personnel in protecting our national security and responding to emergencies across state lines.

Local and state governments would still maintain control over their own policies as the legislation would not interfere with right-to-work laws or existing labor agreements. In fact, many states would not need to make any changes.

The Fire Fighters and EMS Employer-Employee Cooperation Act would give fire and EMS personnel basic collective bargaining rights in states that currently do not provide them and protect these rights in states where they exist but could be repealed.

The legislation gives states wide flexibility to develop their own laws based on the following minimum standards:

- The right to form and join a labor organization and to have that organization recognized through a written contract.
- The right to bargain over working conditions, hours and wages.
- The ability to resolve disputes through an impasse resolution mechanism and, when an agreement is reached, the right to enforce the agreement.

The legislation does not permit strikes and lockouts by fire fighters and EMS personnel.

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.