

KEY POINTS

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

- Legislation providing collective bargaining rights for fire fighters and EMS personnel has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support in Congress. The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation in the 110th Congress by a vote of 314 to 97 with a majority of each party in favor.
- The bill gives maximum flexibility for states to craft their own laws and enables fire fighters and EMS personnel to sit down and talk with their employers. The Cooperation Act respects the uniqueness of each state's employment needs by prohibiting fire fighters or EMS personnel from striking, maintaining states' right-to-work laws and enabling local jurisdictions to make public safety decisions.

Collective bargaining helps protect public safety

- The federal government has a vested interest in improving local emergency response capabilities by supporting adequate staffing, training, and equipment. Beyond local emergencies, preparedness for major interstate emergency incidents, such as natural disasters and terrorist acts, relies on effective local fire and EMS agencies. This readiness is best supported when first responders can work directly with their local government leadership to ensure their needs are met.
- Fire fighters' ability to talk about their job with employers protects public safety and promotes preparedness. Collective bargaining has produced measurable improvements to staffing, training, equipment and health and safety throughout the nation's fire departments. The benefits from this

improved coordination are illustrated by the fact that civilian fire fatality rates are, on average, lower in states that provide these basic rights to fire and EMS personnel.

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.
- The United States has a long history of providing collective bargaining rights to workers. The freedom to assemble is established by the First Amendment to the Constitution and is key to our democracy. These rights were further codified over 80 years ago for private sector workers through passage of the National Labor Relations Act. Those working on the frontlines to protect our communities must be treated the same.

The Cooperation Act strengthens public safety retirement and wages

- Due to the dangerous nature of the profession, fire fighters often are forced to retire early, putting an emphasis on smart retirement planning. Studies show that employers and employees who engage in collective bargaining achieve fairer pension contributions and improved retirement security.
- Collective bargaining also strengthens earnings for those still on the job. Eight of the top 10 states, in terms of disposable income, recognize public employees' rights to collectively bargain. Conversely, nine of the bottom 10 states, in terms of per capita income, do not allow collective bargaining for all public sector workers.