



IAFF 2023

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

LEGISLATIVE ISSUES BOOK

118th CONGRESS • FIRST SESSION



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®

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Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the more than 334,000 members of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), I present a copy of our 2023 Legislative Issues Book. This briefing book will provide you with a better understanding of the policy issues that impact America's professional fire fighters and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel. Our members face significant challenges at the federal, state, and local levels. The decisions you make on Capitol Hill directly impact their ability to do their jobs safely and effectively.

This year, hundreds of IAFF members will gather in our nation's capital from March 5-8 to meet with their elected representatives. I hope that you find the time to meet with the fire fighters and EMS personnel from your district and home state to hear their concerns and understand how the issues outlined in these pages are impacting public safety.

Thank you for your consideration of our issues and needs. Please know that our entire office stands ready to assist you and your staff throughout the year. Do not hesitate to call on us. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Edward A. Kelly
General President

IAFF Legislative Issues Book 118th Congress — First Session

Recognizing Fire Fighters' Occupational Cancer Deaths

Fact Sheet **4**

Key Points **5**

PFAS-Free, Next-Generation Turnout Gear

Fact Sheet **6**

Key Points **7**

Health Insurance for Early Retirees

Fact Sheet **8**

Key Points **9**

Free Speech for Public Safety

Fact Sheet **10**

Key Points **11**

Fire Fighter and EMS Collective Bargaining Rights

Fact Sheet **12**

Key Points **13**

IAFF Advancing Other Legislative Priorities

Fact Sheet **14**

Recognizing Fire Fighters' Occupational Cancer Deaths

The IAFF strongly supports the **Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (Honor Act)** and encourages all members of Congress to cosponsor the bill.

BACKGROUND

Fire fighters exposure to PFAS and other chemicals makes them much more likely to develop cancer than the average person. Nearly 75% of the fire fighter line of duty deaths (LODDs) in 2022 were due to cancer. The World Health Organization is the latest medical body to recognize this occupational danger and classify firefighting as a Group 1 Carcinogen — equal to the cancer risk of smoking cigarettes or unprotected exposure to radiation. The reality for many fire fighters is that their battle with cancer is not a matter of “if,” but “when.”

The Public Safety Officers Benefits (PSOB) program provides death benefits for fire fighters and other first responders killed in the line of duty. Medical deaths like heart attacks and COVID-19 are eligible LODDs. However, occupational cancer is not considered an LODD for the purposes of PSOB.

Last year, the federal government joined 49 of 50 states in providing presumptive workers' compensation benefits for fire fighters battling cancer. Given the hundreds of toxic gases present at fires and PFAS-laced turnout gear, fire fighters face an impossible task of knowing the specific cause of their cancer. Yet when young, healthy fire fighters contract cancer far more often than the average person, we know it is job-related. Denying this occupational connection for their cancer defies common sense and denies fire fighters the benefits they have earned through service.

Whether an LODD occurs due to a flashover,

building collapse, vehicle accident, or heart attack, a family is left behind and often struggles to make ends meet. Cancer deaths are equally job-related for fire fighters. Our nation owes it to the family of fallen fire fighters to stand with them and ensure they don't struggle putting food on the table after losing a loved one.

The Honor Act would rightfully recognize the job-related roots of cancer for fire fighters and classify occupational cancer deaths as an LODD for the purposes of providing a PSOB award to surviving family. Cancer is a plague on the fire service. It is critical that Congress update the list of PSOB-eligible LODDs to include cases of occupational cancer among fire fighters.

The legislation is based on the strongly bipartisan Federal Firefighter Fairness Act which Congress passed last year to grant presumptive workers' compensation benefits to fire fighters battling cancer.

This bill also recognizes the increased cancer risk that other first responders face and provides a pathway for emergency medical services personnel and law enforcement officers to also seek PSOB coverage of occupational cancer deaths when a physician certifies the job-related roots of their cancers.

LEGISLATION

House: [Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act \(Honor Act\)](#), pending introduction
Sponsor: Representative Bill Pascrell (D-NJ)

Senate: [Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act \(Honor Act\)](#), pending introduction
Sponsor: Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

KEY POINTS

Fire fighters face significant cancer risks while serving the public

- Studies have shown that smoke from the average house fire contains more than 140 hazardous chemicals due to the prevalence of synthetic materials and plastics in our homes and offices. Known carcinogens such as arsenic and benzene are often among the carcinogens present in this smoke.
- Turnout gear is another common carcinogenic exposure for fire fighters since it is made with PFAS. PFAS, used as a water and oil repellent, has since been shown to be highly carcinogenic and was recently classified by the Environmental Protection Administration as a “hazardous substance.”
- Other common carcinogenic exposures for fire fighters include diesel exhaust, firefighting foams, and motor vehicle fluids.
- Together, these exposures make fire fighters nearly 10% more likely than the average person to develop cancer and nearly 15% more likely to die from cancer. Fire fighters are at more than a 100% risk of developing certain types of cancer, including mesothelioma and testicular cancer.
- In 2022, nearly 75% of fire fighter line of duty deaths (LODD) were due to occupational cancer.

Need to Update PSOB Benefits

- The Public Safety Officers Benefits (PSOB) program is an important way for the federal government to support the survivors of fire fighters, EMS personnel, and law enforcement officers who are killed in the line of duty.
- PSOB provides surviving family members with a variety of benefits, including a one-time monetary award and Pell grants for the fallen public safety officer’s children.
- Survivors of fallen public safety officers are only eligible to receive a PSOB award if the public safety officer died due to certain circumstances such as a flashover, building collapse, motor vehicle accident, or a limited number of medical conditions.

Occupational cancer deaths must be recognized as LODDs

- The PSOB program currently recognizes several medical conditions as eligible LODDs including heart attacks and strokes. PSOB was updated in 2020 to provide presumptive coverage for public safety officers who die due to COVID-19. Last year, the PSOB program was expanded to recognize occupational PTSD and suicide as eligible LODDs.
- In 2022, Congress passed the Federal Firefighter Fairness Act which recognizes the clear roots of occupational cancer for fire fighters and provides presumptive workers’ compensation benefits for federal fire fighters diagnosed with cancer.
- 49 out of 50 states also provide presumptive workers’ compensation for fire fighters battling cancer due to the countless carcinogenic exposures that fire fighters face throughout their career.
- When 75% of fire fighter LODDs are due to the same medical condition, we cannot continue to ignore those deaths as legitimate LODDs and abandon those fire fighters’ surviving family members.

Congress must support the families of all LODDs

- The PSOB program is an important way for our nation to express its appreciation for those who make the ultimate sacrifice in service to others. PSOB allows public safety officers to know that their families will be supported in the event that they do not return home from work.
- Fire fighters who die from occupational cancer are no different than those who experience a fatal injury or accident when responding to a call.
- Survivors of fire fighters who die from occupational cancer face all the same challenges to pay their mortgage, clothe their children, and afford the necessities of life. It is critical that Congress ensure that they too can access support from the PSOB program.

PFAS-Free, Next-Generation Turnout Gear

The IAFF supports the **Protecting Firefighters and Advancing State-of-the-Art Alternatives (PFAS Alternatives) Act** and encourages all members of Congress to cosponsor the bill and enable research and development of PFAS-free turnout gear.

BACKGROUND

PFAS chemicals are widely known as being carcinogenic – however, they still surround us. Last year, President Biden recognized PFAS as a “hazardous substance” and subjected it to rigorous clean-up requirements to prevent future exposures. For fire fighters, our most common PFAS exposure is our own turnout gear. To fight cancer in the fire service, we must rid our gear of these toxins.

From your first day on the job to your last shift, your turnout gear is your steady companion. We trust that gear to protect from burns, cuts, steam, and chemicals. It keeps us safe in the short-term, but leads to cancer in the long-term. Our gear is laced with toxic PFAS. Fire fighters deserve gear that actually protects us.

Unlike firefighting foam and other sources of PFAS in the fire service, no PFAS-free gear currently exists. We know that this gear is making us sick, but we have no alternatives. Every time we put our gear on and take it off during a shift, we experience more PFAS exposures. These repeated exposures are alarming and unacceptable.

Fire fighters need next-generation turnout gear that is PFAS-free, more resistant to soot and chemicals, and that tells us when we need to clear or fix our gear. Unfortunately, research on this kind of next-generation turnout gear is expensive.

The PFAS Alternatives Act will provide an important source of funding to support research and development efforts to create safer, next-generation turnout gear. By defraying the costs of research and development, we expect that this next-generation turnout gear will be available at a reasonable cost.

This legislation is also critically important because it will require that fire fighters lead the research and guide its outcomes. By combining the practical experience of fire fighters with the research knowledge and experience of science-focused partners, we can ensure that the research will lead to gear that is not just safer, but also practical. The fact that this research will be done by and for fire fighters will ensure it is usable and that no hidden agendas overrule the safety needs of fire fighters.

Lastly, this bill supports educating fire fighters on using and caring for this new turnout gear. While this gear will be more resistant to contaminants, proper wear and maintenance will be critical. Turnout gear has largely remained the same for decades. Educating fire fighters on this next-generation turnout gear will be key to enhancing fire fighter safety and driving cancer out of the fire service.

LEGISLATION

House: [PFAS Alternatives Act, pending introduction](#)
 Sponsor: Representative Debbie Dingell (D-MI)

KEY POINTS

Cancer continues to be the biggest threat to fire fighters

- In 2022, nearly 75% of fire fighter line of duty deaths were due to occupational cancer.
- When compared to the general public, fire fighters are nearly 10% more likely to develop cancer and almost 15% more likely to die from cancer.
- The epidemic of cancer in the fire service is driven by fire fighters' exposure to a wide range of carcinogens which are found smoke, exhaust fumes, and other chemicals. However, PFAS chemicals continue to be one of the most frequent sources of carcinogenic exposure for fire fighters.
- These exposures leave fire fighters up to 100% more likely to develop some forms of cancer such as mesothelioma.

Turnout gear contains PFAS chemicals and fails to protect fire fighters from carcinogens

- Despite advances in science and technology, fire fighters' turnout gear has largely failed to evolve over the past several decades.
- Turnout gear is made of three layers and is designed to protect fire fighters from heat, liquids, and cuts and abrasions.
- PFAS continues to be used in the manufacturing of turnout gear to repel water and other liquids.
- PFAS is a highly carcinogenic chemical which is known to cause several forms of cancer. In 2022, the Biden Administration classified PFAS as a "hazardous chemical" and subjected it to rigorous clean-up requirements to prevent future exposures.
- Despite this knowledge, PFAS has not been removed from turnout gear.
- Turnout gear can also absorb chemicals and carcinogens from emergency calls like fires, vehicle accidents, and hazardous materials incidents.
- Regular washing of turnout gear can help reduce some of these carcinogens; however, PFAS is a "forever" chemical and cannot be removed.

Research is needed to develop next-generation turnout gear

- Fire fighters need next-generation turnout gear to meet today's threats and challenges that they face.
- First and foremost, fire fighters need turnout gear that is PFAS-free. Fire fighters take their gear on and off countless times per shift. It is unacceptable and unconscionable that fire fighters are forced to endure countless exposures to carcinogens every time they wear their turnout gear.
- Additionally, materials science has made tremendous advancements in recent years. Next-generation turnout gear should embrace new materials that are more resistant to absorbing chemicals from smoke and other toxins that fire fighters encounter when working.
- Next-generation turnout gear should also leverage technology to include visual indicators to alert fire fighters of when they have been exposed to dangerous chemicals and when their gear needs to be cleaned or otherwise fixed.
- Fire fighters work a dangerous job and deserve to have turnout gear that actually protects them rather than repeatedly exposing them to toxins.

Any research on turnout gear must be led by fire fighters

- Firefighting is a very unique and often misunderstood profession. Researchers who are knowledgeable about materials science may not understand the unique demands that fire fighters face.
- Solid research requires partnerships – however, fire fighters must be in a leadership position in developing next-generation turnout gear to ensure the final product is both affordable and practical.
- To be effective and embraced by fire fighters, next-generation turnout gear must be developed by fire fighters and for fire fighters. This bill takes meaningful steps to ensure fire fighters oversee this critical research and development process.

Health Insurance for Early Retirees

The IAFF supports the **Healthcare for Heroes Act** and encourages all members of Congress to cosponsor the bill and support retired public safety professionals.

BACKGROUND

Fire fighters and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel work in dangerous and demanding conditions day in and day out. The job takes a serious toll on their physical and mental health. Due to the unique aspects of the profession, public safety officers often retire before the age of 65 and before qualifying for Medicare. As a result, these first responders are left to themselves to obtain comprehensive health coverage during this gap period. As costs increase, finding comprehensive and affordable coverage is becoming harder.

When fire fighters retire in the United States, they essentially have three options for post-retirement healthcare. The first, and least realistic option, is for a fire fighter to have their insurance provided by their former employer until age 65. As health costs continue to rise, this already-rare benefit is disappearing.

Once this happens, retirees have two options. One option is to buy into their old health plan at a substantially higher rate and often without a stipend to defray the cost. This is usually prohibitively expensive for retirees living on a fixed income.

The final option, which is quickly becoming the norm, is to purchase insurance on an insurance exchange or on the open market. These plans are often wildly expensive and lack the comprehensive

coverage that retired fire fighters need to address a career's worth of orthopedic injuries and exposures to carcinogens.

Retirees' challenges in obtaining quality health insurance coverage can be compounded by their limited retirement earnings. Roughly 75% of fire fighters receive no Social Security and their pension benefits can be as low as \$30,000 per year. When a fire fighter's employer eliminates a post-retirement health benefit, the cost of obtaining quality healthcare skyrockets, and the value of their retirement plan craters.

Providing a tax credit to offset the costs of obtaining health insurance could ease the transition into retirement for public safety workers. This tax credit would help defray the out-of-pocket costs that retired public safety professionals are forced to shoulder after a career of serving the public. These savings produce an added benefit would let public safety workers keep more of their hard-earned retirement income for other essential needs after they leave work.

LEGISLATION

House: [Healthcare for Heroes Act, pending introduction](#)
Sponsor: Representative John Larson (D-CT)

Senate: [Healthcare for Heroes Act, pending introduction](#)
Sponsor: Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO)

KEY POINTS

Fire fighters generally retire earlier than other workers, leaving many with gaps in accessing quality health insurance

- The fire service requires a high level of physical and mental exertion and takes a serious toll on workers' health. As a result, many employers force fire fighters to retire as early as age 50, leaving workers burdened with securing expensive health insurance. Many fire fighters are stuck in this limbo for more than a decade until they reach Medicare eligibility.
- In some jurisdictions, fire fighters and EMS personnel are legally forced to retire before reaching age 65. The lack of a realistic gap healthcare option is particularly concerning when individual fire fighters and EMS personnel have no control over their retirement dates.
- Early retirement is linked to the physically demanding aspects of the profession. Studies find that general markers for fitness decline as fire fighters age, including overall physical fitness, body weight, blood pressure, aerobic capacity, and the likelihood of musculoskeletal injuries. Compared to private sector workers, fire fighters are more likely to suffer a workplace injury and take longer to return to work after getting injured.
- Studies also show that fire fighters are significantly more at risk of contracting various cancers. Fire fighters work in dangerous environments and are routinely exposed to toxins, chemicals, and other carcinogens. If a retired fire fighter gets sick because of service to their community, they should not have to worry about finding quality healthcare. Providing a tax credit following their retirement would provide a meaningful way to assist retirees in defraying the cost of the care they need.

Finding quality health insurance on the open market can be difficult and expensive

- Fire fighters have few options to access quality health insurance once they retire. Costs associated with state and federal exchanges are unpredictable year-to-year and vary depending on where one lives. Painful uncertainty results when state exchanges' premium costs fluctuate and insurance providers move in and out of communities each year. These plans also often lack the comprehensive benefits that retirees need to address the injuries and cancer exposures that occurred throughout their careers. Obtaining a private health insurance plan until qualifying for Medicare is often the only way for a retired public safety professional to secure access to reliable and quality health insurance.
- Buying insurance on the open market as an alternative comes with its own set of obstacles as the monthly premium can be very high. Increasing number of retired public safety officers will lose their employer subsidy and be forced to carry 100% of the plan's cost. These costs can quickly amount to more than one-quarter of the retiree's retirement income.

Tax-based approaches can assist early retirees

- The HELPS program is a successful tax-based approach that allows retirees to use their own pension income, on a pre-tax basis, to offset the costs of health insurance.
- Establishing a tax credit for retired public safety officers would be a similar way to ensure dedicated public servants are not penalized in their retirement by being forced to absorb the full costs of obtaining health insurance prior to qualifying for Medicare.

Free Speech for Public Safety

The IAFF supports the **Public Safety Free Speech Act** and encourages all members of Congress to cosponsor the bill and defend fire fighters' right to speak freely and publicly.

BACKGROUND

Fire fighters, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel work jobs unlike any other. First responders go to work every day knowing that they may not come home. All they ask in return is for their communities to provide them with as many protections as possible and give them a fair wage and benefits. When a community breaks this sacred trust, fire and EMS personnel deserve the right to speak about their working conditions. As Americans, we enjoy the right to free speech. However, fire fighters are routinely disciplined or fired for expressing concerns about poor working conditions and lack of safety protections.

Simple investments in safety like new turnout gear, modern SCBAs with higher capacity bottles, safe staffing levels, and regular medical screenings make meaningful differences in protecting fire fighters on the job and ensuring their health. Basic labor practices like adhering to bargaining agreements, paying fair wages, and not imposing undue administrative burdens are easy ways to respect the dignity of fire and EMS personnel as individuals.

Fire fighters and paramedics deserve the right to speak openly when their employer endangers their lives by failing to provide basic safety measures, imposing grueling forced overtime due to staffing shortages, or fail to provide fair wages and benefits.

The COVID-19 Pandemic was the most recent example of fire and EMS personnel facing discipline and dismissal for speaking out on jurisdictions' failure to provide respiratory protections or impose administrative requirements without consultation of first responders or their bargaining unit. Fire and EMS personnel were routinely suspended or fired for speaking out about how these decisions sickened first responders, forced them off the job, and ultimately hurt public safety.

Communities are often unaware of how the emergency services function in their community. When public safety and responder safety is threatened by municipalities, first responders are uniquely positioned to sound the alarm. The Public Safety Free Speech Act ensure first responders cannot be penalized for exercising their right to free speech about job-related concerns like staffing levels, inadequate safety equipment, poor wages and working conditions, or unreasonable administrative rules.

This legislation retains confidentiality rules that prohibit comments about individual patients and incidents. First responders will also continue to be barred from making any statements while on-duty, that can be construed as discriminatory, illegal, violent, or otherwise imply their intent to disrupt or fail to provide emergency services.

LEGISLATION

House: [Public Safety Free Speech Act, pending introduction](#)
 Sponsor: Representative Jefferson Van Drew (R-NJ)

KEY POINTS

First responders deserve the right to speak freely about their jobs

- Fire fighters and EMS work in unique jobs that are often misunderstood by the public. When serving their communities and working on the front lines of emergencies, first responders face occupational dangers that few people have experienced firsthand.
- As experts in emergency response, first responders have the right, and duty, to discuss job-related concerns. Fire fighters and EMS personnel's experience means they are uniquely positioned to explain emergency preparedness needs to the public and elected officials.
- Simple investments in replacing protective gear, providing routine medical screenings, and maintaining safe staffing levels are ways that a community can respect first responders by providing them with safer working conditions. Unfortunately, fire fighters and EMS personnel often face discipline for requesting this support.

Fire fighters and EMS personnel often are suspended or fired for exercising their rights

- Municipalities often have policies that unfairly prohibit fire fighters and EMS personnel from discussing job-related issues publicly. First responders have even faced penalties for exercising their free speech rights when off-duty.
- IAFF members have been penalized for advocating for positions on ballot referendums, informing elected officials about staffing shortages, advocating for improved safety equipment, and submitting a letter to the editor on fire fighters' needs.
- In many cases, first responders challenge these penalties in the courts. Still, they are denied justice due to confusing laws about when public employees can make comments and what disclosures are protected by whistleblower rules.

Congress must protect first responders' basic rights

- The Public Safety Free Speech Act would establish clear protections that ensure all fire fighters, EMS personnel, and law enforcement retain the right to discuss job-related issues such as safety protections, staffing levels, wages and benefits, and administrative requirements imposed on first responders. Once passed, this legislation would allow first responders to seek compensation from their employers for unfairly disciplining them for speaking out on job-related issues while off-duty.
- This legislation would provide protections to ensure that fire fighters and EMS personnel can leverage their experiences to educate community members and policymakers on issues, such as how staffing levels allow for more effective responses and improved safety protections help fire fighters and EMS personnel stay on the job longer and avoid occupational injuries and illnesses.

Basic protections are needed in all 50 states

- The COVID pandemic was another instance where first responders faced penalties for speaking out on issues like the need for personal protective equipment or unfairly imposing administrative regulations without consulting employees.
- Municipalities in both traditionally labor-focused states and right-to-work states trampled on fire fighters' rights to free and public speech.
- Passing the Public Safety Free Speech Act sends a clear message that Congress values our nation's first responders and that all municipalities must honor the constitutional rights of dedicated public servants

Fire Fighter and EMS Collective Bargaining Rights

The IAFF strongly supports the **Public Safety 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 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 Public Safety 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 to enforce it the agreement.

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

LEGISLATION

House: Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2023, pending introduction
Sponsors: Representative Pete Stauber (R-MN); Representative Dan Kildee (D-MI)

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 such legislation in 2007 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 and ensures they receive a fair wage for their work.
- 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.

IAFF Advancing Other Legislative Priorities

In addition to the issues highlighted in this book, the IAFF is actively working on a wide range of other legislative and regulatory initiatives to ensure fire fighters have safe working conditions, fair wages, and secure retirements. A brief description of some of these issues is below:

BACKGROUND

- **Reauthorize the AFG/SAFER Grants:** The AFG and SAFER grant programs are the most meaningful forms of federal support. Together, these programs provide more than \$700 million per year to assist jurisdictions in hiring fire fighters and purchasing apparatus and equipment. The SAFER grant has also played a key role in saving fire fighters' jobs during economic downturns. The authorization for these programs will expire on October 1, and Congress must act to reauthorize them. The IAFF urges Congress to pass the Fire Grants and Safety Act as soon as possible and save these critical grant programs.
- **Establishing fair pay and hours for federal fire fighters:** Federal fire fighters at the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) work 72-hour weeks and receive wages of just \$12 per hour in some places. These grueling schedules and low wages deny fire fighters opportunities to recover after demanding shifts. The IAFF urges Congress to pass the Firefighters Fair Pay Act of 2023 (pending introduction), which will require the DOD to reduce its fire fighters' schedules to a 56-hour week and increase their wages to a meaningful level.
- **Repealing the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP):** The WEP penalizes fire fighters who were exempt from Social Security, but paid into the system through a second job. When these fire fighters retire, the Social Security earnings from their second job are reduced. The IAFF supports the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023 (H.R. 82), which would eliminate the WEP and ensure retired fire fighters can receive their full Social Security.
- **Reducing the FLSA Work Period:** Federal regulations currently force fire fighters to work a 53-hour week before they can be eligible to earn overtime. Fire fighters respond to far more calls for service and emergencies today than when this number was initially created decades ago. This grueling tempo leads to mental and behavioral health issues for fire fighters. The IAFF is working with the Biden Administration to lower the FLSA threshold and improve fire fighters' work-life balance.
- **Supporting Mental Health:** Maintaining strong mental and behavioral health is among fire fighters' most critical challenges. The IAFF's Peer Support program has shown the value of helping fire fighters look out for each other and serve as our own advocates. The IAFF strongly supports the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act which would provide federal funding for fire fighter peer support programs, such as the IAFF's, and educate mental health professionals on the unique needs of fire fighters.
- **Workplace Violence Prevention Act:** Fire and EMS personnel are routinely in dangerous situations and attacked by patients and bystanders. These assaults on first responders are unacceptable and must be stopped. The IAFF supports the Workplace Violence Prevention Act (pending introduction), which would require jurisdictions to develop plans to prevent violent attacks against fire and EMS personnel.

Notes

[illegible]



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