

FEDERAL WORKERS ALLIANCE

COLLECTIVELY REPRESENTING OVER 550,000 FEDERAL AND POSTAL WORKERS

April 4, 2022

The Honorable Robert C. Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott:

The undersigned federal labor organizations of the Federal Workers Alliance (FWA) write to support the immediate consideration of H.R. 2499, the Federal Firefighter Fairness Act, before the House of Representatives. This bipartisan bill aims to allow federal firefighters presumptive disability in a limited number of health conditions which studies have indicated are caused by the firefighters' emergency response duties.

Federal firefighters experience dangerous carcinogens and toxins while defending our military installations, federal research laboratories, homeland security facilities, and veterans' hospitals. Inside these unsafe environments, federal firefighters are putting their health on the line; constant exposure to these contaminants leads to firefighters being at a higher risk for cancer, heart, and lung diseases.

Forty-nine states have enacted legislation that allows presumptive disability benefits for state and local firefighters. *Noticeably, there is no law that covers federal firefighters.*

Under the Federal Employee Compensation Act (FECA), federal firefighters must pick a specific situation for the injury in order to be considered job related. Most injured firefighters cannot meet the burden of proof because of the wide variety of environments and conditions in emergency cases. The cumulative effect of repetitive exposures place firefighters at an increased risk of developing occupational diseases. These are illnesses that are hard to link single events to, meaning that often firefighters are unable to classify their injury as job related and therefore are not eligible to claim compensation under FECA.

The Federal Firefighter Fairness Act works to reduce or eliminate many of the obscure requirements currently impeding federal firefighters from access to their deserved benefits. Currently, firefighters must undergo an administrative process from the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) in order to receive medical care, salary, and health insurance benefits. However, in Fiscal Year 2019, the OWCP received more than 100,000 new cases, and the delayed approval processes lead to delays in employee compensation and payment of

medical bills. This bill gives our federal firefighters the care they have earned without having to go through the lengthy OWCP process only to face a denial of claims later.

The undersigned federal labor organizations of the FWA thanks you for your leadership on this issue for many years, and we support all efforts to bring this critical bill to the Floor to help ensure that all our nation's firefighters are provided the care they need and have earned.

If you have any questions, contact FWA legislative co-chairs Faraz Kahn at fkhan@ifpte.org or Steve Lenkart at slenkart@nffe.org.

Sincerely,

Antilles Consolidated Education Association (ACEA)
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE)
Federal Education Association/National Education Association (FEA/NEA)
International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW)
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)
Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO (MTD)
National Association of Government Employees, SEIU (NAGE)
National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE)
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)
National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO)
Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS)
Patent Office Professional Association (POPA)
United Power Trades Organization (UPTO)