

COMMITTEES:

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EDUCATION AND LABOR

SUBCOMMITTEES:

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HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT, LABOR, AND PENSION



Joe Courtney
Congress of the United States
2nd District, Connecticut

March 24, 2008

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Mr. Peter S. Carozza, Jr.
President
Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut
30 Sherman Street
West Hartford, Connecticut 06110

Dear Mr. Carozza:

Thank you for your March 20, 2008 letter regarding important state legislation to extend presumptive coverage for fire fighters and police officers for cardiac emergencies and other job-related illnesses.

As you well know, firefighters routinely exposed to toxic substances, biohazards, temperature extremes and stress as part of their job. A number of studies have found heart disease, lung disease, certain cancers and other infectious diseases to be occupational hazards of firefighting. I believe that initiatives like HB 5629, reported favorably by the General Assembly's Labor and Public Employees Committee earlier this month, can help expand care for our first responders and their job-related illnesses and injuries. Please be assured that I will follow this bill's progress closely as it moves through the General Assembly.

You may be interested to learn that I strongly support expanding presumptive disability regulations on the federal level. While more than 40 states have enacted "presumptive disability" laws that presume that these health problems such as heart and lung disease are job-related for the purposes of workers compensation and disability retirement unless proven otherwise, no such presumption exists for federal firefighters at military installations, nuclear facilities, VA hospitals and other federal facilities. Instead, federal firefighters must pinpoint the precise incident or exposure that caused a disease or health problem – a burden of proof that is nearly impossible to meet given the variety of conditions they are exposed to.

I am pleased to tell you that I am a cosponsor of the Federal Firefighter Fairness Act (H.R. 1142), which was introduced on February 16, 2007 by Representative Lois Capps (D-CA). This bill would create the presumption that federal firefighters who become disabled by heart disease, lung disease, certain cancers and other infectious diseases contracted the illness on the job. H.R. 1142 has been referred to the House Education and Labor Committee, where it awaits consideration.

Our firefighters, police officers and other first responders are being asked to do more everyday to protect our communities. They are truly on the frontlines, and I strongly support efforts to ensure that we are providing them the resources, benefits and care they have earned for their service to our communities, state and our nation.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to support the fire fighters of Connecticut. As always, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if I can ever be of assistance.

Sincerely,

JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress