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March 5, 2008

Peter S. Carozza, Jr.

President

Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of Connecticut

30 Sherman Street

West Hartford, CT 06110

Dear President Carozza:

I am writing today to express my strong support for H.B. 5629 – An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation for Firefighters, Police Officers and Emergency Rescue Workers – now pending in the Connecticut General Assembly and to inform you of my efforts to enact similar legislation in the U.S. Senate to protect federal fire fighters.

Each day, first responders across our nation selflessly risk their health and safety to protect the lives and property of those in their community. Among first responders, fire fighters face some of the most physically challenging and dangerous working conditions. By the very nature of their profession, fire fighters are at a greater risk for certain work related illness including heart disease, lung disease, infectious disease and certain types of cancer. These illnesses often temporarily limit the ability of fire fighters to perform their duties and can lead to a permanent loss of their livelihood.

Nevertheless, a small minority of states, including Connecticut, and the federal government place the burden squarely on fire fighters to prove that their illness is tied to a specific work-related incident. Since fire fighters may respond to hundreds of calls per year, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to tie an illness such as cancer, heart disease or hepatitis C to a specific incident. It is far more likely that a serious illness is the result of cumulative exposure to hazards such as smoke, heat, toxins and stress over a prolonged period of time rather than a single response call. Therefore, because of the extremely high burden of proof that is placed on first responders, they often go without the compensation they justly deserve when they are faced with a serious, prolonged and debilitating illness.

The Connecticut General Assembly has an opportunity to remedy this injustice with the passage of H.B. 5629. While some of the bill's opponents have characterized it as needless and fiscally irresponsible, in my view the bill affords municipalities numerous safeguards against abuse of the workers' compensation system by first responders. I am hopeful that leaders in the Connecticut General Assembly will be able to work with first responders and municipalities to pass a final bill that offers our state's first

responders the workers' compensation protections they deserve while taking into account the difficult financial position that many municipalities currently face.

On the federal level, I am a cosponsor of S.1924, the Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2007. This bill would offer federal fire fighters many of the same protections that H.B. 5629 aims to extend to Connecticut's first responders. Heart disease, lung disease, specified cancers and infectious diseases would all be presumed to be proximately caused by the federal fire fighter's job related activities unless such a presumption can be rebutted by a preponderance of the evidence.

Our nation's first responders are true heroes in every sense of the word and all of us in public service have a great deal to learn from those that risk their health and safety each day to ensure ours. Ensuring that you and your families are well cared for and justly compensated when your profession causes you illness is just one way in which we can acknowledge the sacrifices that you make to protect us from harm.

Thank you for your service and I look forward to working with you to pass these critical pieces of legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Lieberman", written in a cursive style.

Joseph I. Lieberman
UNITED STATES SENATOR