

House Approves Bill to Extend Collective Bargaining Rights to Public Safety Workers in all 50 States

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WASHINGTON, DC -- By an overwhelming, bipartisan vote of 314-97, the House of Representatives last week approved legislation to guarantee the rights of public safety workers in all 50 states to collectively bargain for better wages, benefits and working conditions.

"The brave men and women who risk their lives each day and serve as our first line of defense against medical emergencies, criminals, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks deserve the right to bargain with their employers," said Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. "Collective bargaining rights will enable rank-and-file public safety workers not only to improve their own working conditions, but also to have more input into the day-to-day operations of their departments."

"Our firefighters and police officers risk their lives to keep us safe," said Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI), the sponsor of the legislation. "Yet there are some states in this country that deny them the basic right to discuss workplace issues with their employers - a right many Americans have. At the very least, they should be allowed to negotiate for wages, hours and safe working conditions."

"Today's House passage of the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007 marks a historic day in America," said Rep. Rob Andrews (D-NJ), chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions. "H.R. 980 extends the basic right to discuss workplace issues with their employers to our firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency medical services personnel and corrections officers."

Approximately 20 states do not fully protect the collective bargaining rights of firefighters, police officers, corrections officers and emergency medical service workers. Two states - Virginia and North Carolina - prohibit public safety employees from collectively bargaining at all.

The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act (H.R. 980) would provide basic labor protections for state and local public safety workers, including:

- The right to join a union;
- The right to have their union recognized by their employer;
- The right to bargain collectively over hours, wages and terms and conditions of employment;
- A mediation or arbitration process for resolving an impasse in negotiations; and
- Enforcement of the bill's provisions through the courts.