



***International Association of Fire Fighters,
AFL-CIO, CLC***

***Submission to
Standing Committee on Finance
2012 Pre-budget Consultations***

August, 2011

Executive Summary

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) represents over 21,700 professional fire fighters in Canada; men and women who risk their safety and their lives on a daily basis to protect the lives and property of their fellow citizens.

Professional fire fighters protect 85 per cent of the nation's population and infrastructure and are first on scene in virtually any kind of emergency, whether it's a structural fire requiring rescue and suppression, a medical emergency such as a heart attack or a vehicular or industrial accident requiring extrication.

Fire fighters are also first on scene to emergencies involving hazardous materials, including incidents of a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive (CBRNE) nature, whether it is the result of an industrial or highway accident, a natural disaster or an act of terrorism. Professional fire fighters are Canada's first line of defense and are part of the nation's critical infrastructure.

The IAFF welcomes this opportunity to share our views with the Committee and we respectfully submit two recommendations that address the long standing needs of professional fire fighters and their families and of the public as well, in terms of improving public safety. These prudent measures would underscore the government's commitment to the interest of Canadian families and the strength and safety of our communities.

Numerous factors contribute to the nation's economic stability. As indicated in Budget 2011, the next phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan, the health of families and the strength and safety of our communities are key to Canada's economic potential and Canadians' quality of life. With this in mind, the IAFF makes two recommendations to the Committee.

Our first recommendation is the creation of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) benefit for the families of fallen fire fighters. The IAFF proposes a benefit in the amount of \$300,000 as a direct payment to surviving family members of a fire fighter who dies in the line of duty or to a fire fighter who is permanently disabled in the course of his or her duties. This benefit is needed in order to ensure a minimum level of financial security for Canadian families who have lost a primary source of income.

Our second recommendation is that the Committee recognize the cost efficiencies and the increased level of fire fighter and public safety made possible by the Government of Canada's contributions to the IAFF Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative and advise the government to consider funding a second five-year instalment of the program beginning in the fiscal year 2012-2013.

Recommendations

1. The IAFF requests that the Standing Committee on Finance recommend that the Government of Canada allocate funds for the establishment of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) benefit for the families of fallen fire fighters

Fire fighting is a dangerous profession. Studies confirm that those in the profession suffer the highest rate of job-related illness and injury of any occupation, the result of innumerable hazards they encounter every day in the course of protecting the lives and property of Canadians.

On any given call, a fire fighter may be required to enter a burning and damaged structure or other confined space that is choked with toxic smoke, or respond to highway accidents or other medical calls where they can be exposed to infectious diseases. Additionally, several forms of cancer are now recognized as occupational diseases in fire fighters.

Fire fighters are aware of these risks when they choose the profession. Fire fighters are also aware that they are the nation's first line of defense in the event of an attack of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear nature on Canadian soil.

Fire fighters are prepared to face these dangers and they are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice without hesitation in order to save the lives and property of Canadians and protect the nation's infrastructure.

In the United States, the federal government has taken a responsible role and since 1976 has administered the Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB). This indexed benefit is immediately available to the families of public safety officers who are killed or disabled in the course of their duties.

The U.S. government did not hide behind jurisdictional arguments when it created the benefit. It recognized that implementing the PSOB was the right thing to do. The benefit is available to all public safety officers, regardless of whether they are employed municipally or federally. First implemented at \$50,000, this indexed benefit currently stands at \$318,111.64.

There is no greater example of the sacrifice that fire fighters are prepared to make on behalf of their nation than the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City. When terrorists attacked the United States, it was municipal fire fighters who were first on scene, rushing into the burning, twisted wreckage of the two towers in the hopes that lives might be saved. Sadly, 343 of those fire fighters made the ultimate sacrifice on that fateful day.

As a nation grieved, thoughts turned quickly to their survivors; families who in most cases had lost their primary source of income. How would the financial security of these families be protected? Who would ensure they would be able to meet their financial burdens in the wake of these tragic circumstances?

Thankfully, the U.S. PSOB was there to assist the surviving family members financially in the wake of the terrible events of 9-11; in fact in October, 2001 the benefit was increased from \$154,199 to

\$250,000 and the amount was applied retroactively to January 1, 2001, so that the families of public safety officers who died in the line of duty on 9-11 received the increased amount.

As we approach the ten year anniversary of the 9-11 tragedies, time is of the essence to provide Canadian fire fighters with a similar benefit. Currently there is no national standard for what the family of a fallen fire fighter will receive in terms of compensation. In raising this issue at the federal level in Canada, the IAFF has encountered the argument that because most fire fighters are municipally employed, it is municipalities that should provide some form of compensation. The truth is that only a minority of professional fire fighters have been able to bargain this kind of benefit, and even so, it is in many cases just a token amount – not nearly enough to realistically address the needs of a grieving family that has lost a major source of income.

Among those fire fighters who have been able to negotiate a line of duty death benefit, a typical benefit is two years' continuation of the fire fighter's salary, which is enough to keep the surviving spouse and their family in the family home for two years. Then what?

If a fire fighter dies at age 43 – the average for fireground line-of-duty deaths - even \$300,000 is only about a quarter of the income that the family would have received over the next 17 years if that fire fighter had worked until age 60 at an average salary.

The financial security of the family of a fire fighter who is killed or permanently disabled on behalf of Canadians should not be in question, and it should not depend on the uncertainties of the collective bargaining process or the province in which they live. It is deserving of an equitable national standard; a minimum base amount that would apply to all fire fighters on top of any line of duty death benefit they may be eligible for locally.

During the 38th Session of Parliament, NDP MP Peter Julian (Burnaby – New Westminster, B.C.) introduced M-153 in the House of Commons. M-153 states that in the opinion of the House of Commons, the federal government should establish a national benefit for the families of fallen and permanently disabled fire fighters.

M-153 was adopted in the House of Commons by a vote of 161 to 112, demonstrating that a majority of MPs representing a majority of Canadians agree it is appropriate to establish a PSOC benefit for the families of fallen fire fighters.

From a budgetary perspective, a PSOC benefit at \$300,000 would cost the Canadian government approximately \$7.7 million annually, based on the current average of 18.6 fire fighters and seven police officers who die in the line of duty annually in Canada.

The establishment of a national PSOC benefit in Canada is an appropriate way for the nation to recognize the sacrifice made by a fallen fire fighter and to address the financial security of the fire fighter's family. This benefit should be established in the amount of \$300,000 and function as a direct, indexed benefit to the fire fighter's family.

Until a national PSOC benefit is established in Canada, the families of the nation's professional fire fighters stand to endure financial hardship in addition to the grief of losing a loved one. It is time for

the federal government to act on the need for this benefit and respond to the adoption of M-153 by implementing a national PSOC benefit for the families of Canadian fire fighters killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

- 2. The IAFF requests that the Standing Committee on Finance recommend that the Government of Canada consider funding a second five-year instalment of the IAFF's Canadian Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative after the completion of the fiscal year 2012-2013.**

Public safety has been at the forefront of global concerns, sparked from recent tragic events including the devastating earthquakes in Japan and New Zealand, to the terrorist bombings in Norway. We should not deny that such events are within the realm of possibility on home soil. Key on-the-ground emergency preparedness initiatives are integral to ensuring disaster mitigation.

In the event of a chemical or biological attack in a Canadian city, military-based response can take hours or even days to arrive. It is our professional fire fighters that are first on the scene in mere minutes. Currently, only five provinces (Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Alberta and Saskatchewan), have access to CBRNE training. Furthermore, while a small handful of cities such as Ottawa, do have appropriate hazardous materials or chemical-biological response teams in place, the vast majority do not, leaving a majority of Canadians completely vulnerable to the aftermath of an explosive, biological, nuclear, chemical or radiological attack. An inappropriate response to the incident would only compound the potential impact on the public and the responding fire fighters.

The IAFF identified the need for targeted training and developed a Hazardous Materials and CBRNE Training for First Responders Program. The training is designed to complement existing federal initiatives and significantly bolsters the number of front-line first responders prepared to protect Canadians in the event of a terrorist attack or other emergency involving CBRNE or other hazardous materials.

In Budget 2007, the federal government recognized the importance of this program and granted a five year Haz-Mat CBRNE training fund to facilitate the training required to prepare fire fighters for such scenarios.

This program has proven to be extremely successful. To date, the IAFF has dedicated 23,448 hours of technical training and has successfully trained a total of 977 first responders across Canada, including full-time and volunteer fire fighters, police officers, search and rescue workers and others. The continuation of this program is essential in expanding our training to additional provinces and territories. A second instalment of this fund will ensure that more first responders are adequately trained at an appropriate level of hazardous materials response in more communities across Canada. And because it is a "train the trainer" program, the program's effects are multiplied exponentially.

The IAFF is committed to maximizing the cost-effectiveness of the program by continuing to use resources already in place. As such, virtually 100 per cent of the federal funding would go towards actual instruction. Furthermore, there are no significant travel costs as trainers deliver the program

locally. From a national economic perspective, proper haz-mat resources aid in containing disasters that expand and impact public health and safety, infrastructure and natural resources. Costly damages can be minimized by rigorous training of the most updated resources and local response capabilities.

With the aforementioned in mind, the IAFF calls on the federal government to allocate a second five-year instalment to allow Canada's first responders to safely and effectively respond to acts of terrorism through the IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders Program. The continuation of this program is a valuable way for the federal government to address this issue of critical importance to the lives and safety of Canadian all citizens.

The recommendations that the IAFF has proposed for the upcoming budget are relevant to the federal government's aim to ensure shared prosperity and a high standard of living for all Canadians, as the health, safety and well being of our citizens will continue to be effectively protected against any circumstance. It will also ensure that Canada's professional fire fighters and their families will receive a minimum level of financial security in the event that they are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

The IAFF appreciates this opportunity to submit our views to the Standing Committee on Finance for consideration in pre-budget consultations. We respectfully request the opportunity to discuss our views with the committee in person during scheduled hearings later this year.

Sincerely yours,

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