



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO

March 29, 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 National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) is urging swift consideration of H.R. 2499, the Federal Firefighter Fairness Act, in the House of Representatives. Thanks to your leadership, this bill is a bipartisan agreement that seeks 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. As America's oldest federal Union representing more than 10,000 federal wildland and structural firefighters across the government, NFFE strongly support all efforts to pass this bill.

Federal firefighters are subject to highly dangerous carcinogens and toxins while defending our military installations, federal research laboratories, homeland security facilities, and veterans' hospitals. While battling fire and other events in unsafe environments, federal firefighters are putting their health on the line. The constant exposure to these contaminants leads firefighters to be at higher risk for cancer, heart, and lung diseases. Forty-nine states have enacted legislation that allows presumptive disability for firefighters, however, the federal government does not.

Currently, the Federal Employee Compensation Act (FECA) forces federal firefighters to pinpoint the precise incident for it to be considered job related. For most injured firefighters, the burden of proof is extraordinarily difficult to satisfy because of the wide variety of environments and conditions in emergency cases over years of service. The diseases are a result of multiple encounters with toxins, and the cumulative effect of repetitive exposures place firefighters at an increased risk of developing these 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 cumbersome requirements currently impeding federal firefighters from expedited access to the benefits they need and deserve. Without presumptive benefits, firefighters must undergo a lengthy administrative process from the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) to receive medical care, salary, and health insurance benefits. Under current law, these claims are denied often.

Again, thank you for your leadership on this critical issue of life and death for federal firefighters. NFFE is committed to assisting with all efforts to move the bill forward.

Sincerely,

Randy Erwin, National President