

May 24, 2022

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman and members of the Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs:

On behalf of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE), which is dedicated to advancing the interests of the more than 5 million federal employees and retirees, as well as their spouses and survivors, I urge you to favorably report S. 1116, the Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2021 when it is considered by the committee.

S. 1116 would create a presumption of occupational illness for federal fire fighters, covering ailments like cardiovascular disease, cancers and certain infectious diseases that 49 states already presume are work-related for their state and local firefighters. Passing this bill would bring federal rules in line with the vast majority of states who recognize the occupational danger placed on firefighters and solve an inequity placed on the brave men and women who choose this line of work through federal service.

Federal firefighters face an onerous process to address their occupationally derived illness. The current system requires them to go through the Office of Workers Compensation Programs (OWCP) and prove that their disease is connected to a specific event and carcinogenic exposure. This is a burdensome and time-consuming task that fails to account for the numerous toxic exposures firefighters face. To make matters worse, OWCP has a lengthy review process, upwards of 10 months, which delays employee compensation and even medical treatment.

Federal fire fighters operate in some of the most hazardous environments in the federal service. They respond to threats at military installations, federal research laboratories, veterans' hospitals and other federal sites across the country, exposing them to high levels of smoke, heat, stress, and toxic elements. The current system fails to adequately take these consistent exposures into account and it's time for Congress to end this unfair practice. We owe it to them correct this current wrong.

For these reasons, I urge you to support the Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2021. Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact NARFE's Staff Vice President for Policy and Programs John Hatton at jhatton@narfe.org.



Ken Thomas
NARFE National President