



Submission to the HoC Standing Committee on Finance

IAFF 2014 Pre-Budget Submission

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Executive Summary

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) represents over 22,000 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 and protect the nation's critical infrastructure.

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, protecting citizens from hazardous materials or a vehicular or industrial accident requiring extrication.

The IAFF welcomes this opportunity to share our views with the Committee and we respectfully submit our budget recommendation to address the longstanding needs of professional fire fighters and their families and of the public.

An increasing number of Canadian families are facing stagnant wages and rising education costs, leading to a decrease in overall national economic growth. In the case of a family of a fallen fire fighter, their financial burden would be considerably heightened, raising uncertainty about their long-term financial security at a time when they are already dealing with their grief.

Budget 2014 committed to supporting families and communities, improving the quality of life for hard-working Canadian families. With this in mind, the IAFF recommends 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.

Implementing this benefit would underscore the government's commitment to the interest of Canadian families affected by the loss of a loved one, in the name of public safety, and the support it will lend to help get them back on their feet.

Recommendation:

The IAFF requests that the Standing Committee on Finance recommend that the Government of Canada allocate funds for the immediate 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). 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 \$333,604.68.

There is currently no Canadian 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.

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.

The existence of a \$250,000 benefit for the survivors of Canadian Armed Forces personnel and RCMP officers who are killed in the line of duty demonstrates that the federal government understands this notion; the IAFF asserts that fire fighters are the nation's domestic defenders and their sacrifices are equally deserving of the same basic level of recognition.

Over the course of the years, the IAFF has heard the concerns of cost being the overarching impediment to implementing this benefit. On April 22, 2013 the former Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety provided the House of Commons with an estimated PSOC cost of \$61.2 million, stating that it would be unreasonable to fund in the current climate of federal fiscal restraint. This was an inaccurate estimate as the Parliamentary Budget Officer's preliminary analysis of the PSOC benefit from May 22, 2013, stated that it would cost the Canadian government approximately \$6.1 million per year; \$1.4 million less than the IAFF's estimate, indicating that "the implementation of such a benefit program will not have any material fiscal impact."

Further examination from the Department of Public Safety revealed that the federal estimate of \$61.2 million was a cumulative total based on the 204 firefighters who died in the last 10 years, multiplied by the proposed \$300,000 benefit. This clearly verifies that the IAFF cost estimate is in line with the Parliamentary Budget Officer's analysis.

The IAFF maintains that a PSOC benefit could be funded easily from existing revenues sources and would cost the Canadian government approximately \$7.5 million annually, based on the current average of 18 fire fighters and seven police officers who die in the line of duty annually in Canada.

This issue of a PSOC benefit has been addressed in Parliament numerous times in the form of private members' motions. The adoption of M-153 in 2005 and the adoption of M-388 in 2012 are clear indications that a majority of MPs representing a majority of Canadians believe the federal government should establish a national PSOC benefit.

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 by implementing a national PSOC benefit for the families of Canadian fire fighters killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

The IAFF respectfully requests the opportunity to appear before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Finance, in Ottawa, to outline our recommendation in further detail.