



HOWARD COUNTY PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION I.A.F.F. LOCAL 2000

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**Submitted on behalf of the Howard County Professional Fire Fighters Association, IAFF Local 2000.
Our members support House Bill 205.**

1. Standard Labor Practices in Other Industries

In most industries across the country, 40 hours per week is the standard for full-time employment. However, in the firefighting and emergency medical services professions, we regularly work longer shifts due to the nature of the job. This bill helps align our overtime policies with what workers in other fields already experience while reflecting the unique demands of firefighting. Furthermore, law enforcement officers, who also work in public safety, are typically scheduled for a 42-hour week, and most, if not all, members of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) work a 40-hour week.

2. High Stress, Physically Taxing Job

Firefighting is one of the most physically and emotionally demanding jobs. We often operate in high-stress, hazardous conditions involving fire, smoke, toxic fumes, and medical emergencies. These working environments take a significant toll on the body and mind. Longer working hours increase the risk of burnout and physical injury, as there is less time for proper rest and recovery. Fatigue and overexertion not only jeopardize the well-being of individual firefighters but also undermine the safety of the teams they work with and the communities they serve. By compensating firefighters and paramedics fairly for overtime and promoting work-life balance through clearly defined limits, this bill supports the physical and mental health of the firefighting workforce.

3. Addressing the Labor Shortage in the Fire Service

The firefighting and emergency medical services professions face a significant labor shortage. We must offer competitive compensation and fair working conditions to attract new recruits and retain experienced professionals. The next generation of firefighters will not enter the field unless they see it as a sustainable career with reasonable working hours and the opportunity for fair compensation when overtime is required. Implementing these reforms will help entice people to work in firefighting and emergency medical care by offering them the same protections already afforded to their peers in law enforcement and emergency medical services.

4. Work-Life Balance and Recovery

A greater work-life balance is essential for firefighters and emergency medical service providers to maintain both their physical and mental health. Extended shifts and long, arduous hours place immense strain on firefighters, making recovery time between shifts even more critical. Firefighters and emergency medical service providers should have the opportunity to spend time with their families, recover from stressful situations, and attend to their own physical and emotional needs without worrying about financial consequences from using accrued leave. This bill ensures that firefighters and emergency medical service providers are fairly compensated for their time while respecting their rights to scheduled leave and promoting a healthier work-life balance.

5. Limitations of Collective Bargaining in Reducing Work Hours

While collective bargaining has been a valuable tool for addressing firefighter labor concerns, attempts to reduce work hours through this process have not been successful in all jurisdictions. In many cases, the bargaining process is slow and does not adequately address the urgent needs of firefighters working long hours under challenging conditions.

Without legislative intervention, many firefighters and paramedics remain locked into schedules that far exceed the standard 40-hour workweek, contributing to stress, fatigue, and workforce attrition. This bill provides a necessary, uniform framework that can be implemented more quickly and effectively than relying solely on collective bargaining agreements that vary widely across jurisdictions.