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KANSAS STATE COUNCIL OF FIRE FIGHTERS



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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS • KANSAS AFL-CIO • CENTRAL LABOR BODIES

Testimony of Robert S. Wing

Re: House Bill No. 2719

My name is Robert S. Wing. I am a captain in the Fire Department of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas. I have been a fire fighter for 41 years. I am also President of the Kansas State Council of Fire Fighters and the Business Manager of the International Association of Fire Fighters, Local 64. I appear here today to speak in favor of House Bill No. 2719.

In 2010, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) began a multi-year study of nearly 30,000 fire fighters from the San Francisco, Chicago, and Philadelphia Fire Departments to better understand the potential link between firefighting and cancer. This study was a joint effort led by researchers at NIOSH in collaboration with researchers at the National Cancer Institute and the University of California at Davis Department of Public Health Sciences, and supported in part by the United States Fire Administration. The study was completed in 2015.

The fire fighters that were studied showed higher rates of certain types of cancer than the general population of the United States. Based on U.S. cancer rates, fire fighters in the study had a greater number of cancer diagnosis and cancer related deaths. These were mostly oral, digestive, respiratory and urinary cancers. There were about twice as many fire fighters with malignant mesothelioma, a rare type of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. Exposure to asbestos while firefighting is the most

likely explanation for this. There were more cases of certain cancers among younger fire fighters. Fire fighters in the study who were under 65 years of age had more bladder and prostate cancers than expected. Comparing fire fighters in the study to each other, the chance of lung cancer diagnosis or death increased with the amount of time spent at fires. The chance of leukemia death increased with the number of fire runs. It was further evidenced that fire fighters are at increased risk of certain types of cancer as a result of occupational exposure. Raised awareness and exposure prevention effects should increase efforts to educate fire fighters about safe work practices, including proper training, proper use of protective clothing, and proper use of respiratory protection during all phases of firefighting.

The I.A.F.F. has introduced legislation in both houses of congress labeled the Fire Fighter Cancer Registry Act of 2017. The proposed legislation would create a national registry specifically for fire fighters, managed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to improve data collection and research on cancer in fire fighters. The bill, H.R.931, passed the House unanimously and legislation is awaiting Senate consideration.

In summary, fire fighters are at a significant risk for cancer. Fire fighters have elevated rates of many types of cancer, and cancer is the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths among fire fighters. A 2013 study by the National Institute of Occupational Study and Health (NIOSH) found fire fighters have a 14 per cent increase risk of dying from cancer as compared to the general population.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank every member of the Kansas legislature for their longtime support of the fire fighters in the great State of Kansas, and respectfully ask your support of H.B. 2719.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R S Wing', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert S. Wing

President, Kansas State Council of Fire Fighters

Business Manager, IAFF Local 64