



February 9, 2021

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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the House Labor Committee,

First and foremost, I hope all are well. The R.I. State Association of Fire Fighters is in support of House bill 5178. This bill has been before you for the last several years, so I won't go into great detail as you have heard me testify on this legislation many times. For the new Reps. on the committee feel free to call me with any questions. I will tell you that municipalities and fire districts for the most part have honored the collective bargaining agreement when they have expired while we continue to negotiate or if we unfortunately have to go to arbitration. But recently it's been happening, and certain labor attorneys hired by the municipalities and districts are threatening to not honor the contracts once expired. This is an important issue for us because in fire fighter collective bargaining agreements we have negotiated clauses in our contracts that involve our safety. And that is what really worries us the most, as firefighters our mission, is to save lives, help people in their darkest, scariest hour and go home after every shift.

Our opponents of the bill will tell you that if the collective bargaining agreement continues after expiration we would never bargain in good faith. If you look at the R.I. Fire Fighters Arbitration Act, we are under strict time guidelines to negotiate an agreement. First, we have to notify the municipality or district 120 days before the last day on which money can be appropriated by the city or town to cover the contract period which is the subject of the collective bargaining procedure. The municipality, town or district then have 10 days to start negotiation. If we do not reach an agreement in 30 days, we are mandated to file for arbitration. So, the fire fighter arbitration act prohibits us from sitting on an expired collective bargaining agreement. Please contact me with any questions, 401-824-4046 or pvallettajr@gmail.com Thank you for your consideration.

Paul Valletta Jr.

R.I. State Association of Fire Fighters