

# Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act of 2023

**House Leads:** Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and Rep. Carlos Giménez (R-FL)

**Senate Leads:** Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND)

**Endorsed by:** International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), National Fallen Fire Fighters Foundation (NFFF), Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI), Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO), Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association (FLEOA), and Sergeants Benevolent Association of the NYPD (SBA).

**Background:** First responders face a significantly higher risk of developing cancer due to exposure to carcinogens encountered in the line of duty. The Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program provides federal death and disability benefits to first responders and their families. While medical conditions like heart attacks, strokes, and COVID-19 are presumed to be line of duty deaths for the purposes of PSOB, occupational cancer is not.

The connection between occupational cancer and firefighting is well-established. Smoke from the average house fire contains more than 140 hazardous chemicals, including carcinogens like arsenic and benzene. Last year, cancer was the leading cause of death among fire fighters, accounting for 74% of line of duty deaths according to the IAFF.

A recent International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) study reclassified the occupation of firefighting itself to its highest hazard category: Group 1 or "carcinogenic to humans." In 2015, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) published a multi-year study finding that fire fighters are 9% more likely to develop cancer and 14% more likely to die from cancer relative to the general population.

Law enforcement officers also encounter chemical hazards, heat, and radiation connected to cancer in the line of duty. In 2011, the State University of Buffalo and NIOSH published research finding elevated incidence of brain cancer and Hodgkin's lymphoma among law enforcement officers relative to the general population. The research cited several other studies that have demonstrated an increased risk of mortality among police due to multiple forms of cancer.

The PSOB program is an important way for our nation to express its appreciation for those who make the ultimate sacrifice. First responders who die from occupational cancer are no different than those who experience a fatal injury or accident when responding to a call.

**The Solution:** The Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act of 2023 (Honor Act) would rightfully recognize the job-related roots of cancer for first responders by providing presumptive benefits for occupational cancer under the PSOB program.

This bill ensures that the death or permanent disability of a public safety officer due to an exposure-related cancer is presumed a personal injury sustained in the line of duty under the PSOB program if certain conditions are met. The presumption does not apply if competent medical evidence establishes the cancer was unrelated to exposure in the line of duty. The legislation allows additional cancers to be covered by the presumption based on a periodic review of the best available scientific evidence and an open petitioning process.