



VIRGINIA PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

18 NORTH 8TH STREET

RICHMOND, VA 23219

IAFF - AFL-CIO

March 30, 2026

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger, Governor
Commonwealth of Virginia
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Spanberger:

As the elected Executive Board of the Virginia Professional Fire Fighters, we represent nearly 11,000 professional firefighters, emergency medical services providers and communications officers across the Commonwealth. We protect the lives and property of over 85% of all Virginians.

We write to urge for your approval of the collective bargaining legislation which was passed by both chambers of the General Assembly and is currently awaiting your signature. This legislation has been carefully developed by members of both houses with the input of labor organizations across the Commonwealth. It is what is required for the Commonwealth to be respectful to both workers and the taxpayers they represent.

The Virginia Association of Counties (VACo), the lobbying organization for local government, is rallying local boards and elected officials to speak out and take votes against this legislation. They have drafted resolutions, provided talking points and distributed inaccurate information. These efforts directly demonstrate the very need and rationale for why this legislation was brought forward.

Specifically, we would like to address the following points which VACo has provided directly to their members and which they have directly used in resolutions.

-Collective bargaining would divert limited local resources from core services to new administrative and bargaining structures without dedicated funding.

An agreement between the actual people who do the work for citizens and the supervisors within their governmental structure would not divert local resources from core services. It would strengthen core services and ensure a framework for negotiation on key items related to employee compensation, benefits and working conditions. These are core services which are already being provided "without dedicated funding."

-Collective bargaining would eliminate local flexibility to align workforce decisions with budgets and service needs.

Any agreement between a collective bargaining unit (group of employees) and their locality would be discussed and negotiated. Additionally, as spelled out in the legislation, localities would continue to maintain control over their budgets. Who better understands the needs of a community than the workers who actually provide the services to it? These employees are the ones who live in the communities they serve and understand the communities unique challenges.

-Collective bargaining would create unpredictable fiscal obligations through arbitration and expanded dispute resolution processes.

Collective bargaining is not unpredictable. On the contrary, collective bargaining provides a predictable annual agreement for service that provides negotiated clauses which allows a locality the ability to plan and budget. In case of impasse, each side has the same ability to appeal to an arbitrator, and each side is bound by the decision. The dispute resolution process provides for an expedited decision-making authority to keep both sides in compliance with set rules and agreements ensuring no lapse in service to the taxpayer. Additionally, this legislation maintains Virginia's long-standing prohibition against strikes or lockouts ensuring workers stay on the job and essential services continue.

-Collective bargaining would increase administrative burden, litigation risk, and long-term costs for local taxpayers.

The amount of burden, risk and cost for a locality is directly related to how much effort they will place on not supporting their employees or fighting against the collective bargaining process. Both sides of a collective bargaining agreement assume and negotiate burden, risk and costs. If a locality invests in their workforce, and the service they provide their community, the community wins. Whether it be schools, public safety or public utilities, the service provided by an engaged local jurisdiction and an engaged workforce can only benefit the taxpayers they represent.

The points above which have been distributed by VACo are simply stoking the fear of the unknown. For Virginia's firefighters, there are currently eight localities who have negotiated and signed collective bargaining agreements with their workers. These have led to a more engaged and satisfied workforce, better overall retention of workers, a clear set of operating principles, and a predictable annual budget commitment. Not one locality has had to raise taxes to afford these agreements.

This legislation is also about more than just collective bargaining and an eventual contract for services. It is about affordability and respect for the working class. The affordability which allows a worker who dedicates their life to public service to be paid fairly. And the respect for workers which allows them a seat at the table for important decisions which affect their professional life, health and safety.

As we have stated all along, the rights of workers should not depend on the zip code where they live and work. Workers from Bristol to Virginia Beach, and Danville to Fairfax County, all want the same thing, the respect and dignity this collective bargaining bill would finally provide.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Robert Bragg, President



Paul J. Hebert, Secretary/Treasurer



Kevin Weeks, District Vice President
Southwest Virginia



Jess Rodzinka, District Vice President
Western Virginia



Robert Leeper, District Vice President
Northern Virginia



Mitch Nason, District Vice President
Shenandoah Valley



William J. Boger, District Vice President
Central Virginia



Kurt Detrick, District Vice President
Tidewater