



# *Michigan Professional* **FIRE FIGHTERS UNION**

Mark Docherty  
*President*

1651 Kingsway Ct., Ste. E, Trenton, MI 48183  
(734) 675-0206 • fax (734) 675-6083

Terrence H. Chesney  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

[www.mpffu.org](http://www.mpffu.org)

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Committee members. My name is Mark Docherty and I am the President of the Michigan Professional Fire Fighters Union and a Battalion Chief with the Sterling Heights Fire Department. I represent approximately 4000 fulltime firefighters in 130 different communities statewide.

I come before you today to speak in opposition of HB 6074 and all of the other associated bills.

Firefighting is a career path that is very rewarding at times but also comes with its risks. Throughout our career we are exposed to many different hazards while performing our jobs. We face exposure to many hazardous chemicals and carcinogens in every fire we fight.

Due to the nature of our job, we have a high rate of injury, which has lasting effects on our bodies. Most retire with chronic back, shoulder and knees injuries. Heart disease is also common from sudden changes in physical exertion without the ability for your body to adjust.

We face a 62% cancer rate from our exposures while fighting fire. As I'm sure you know, you don't develop cancer from one exposure. It's through repeated exposures over your entire career. This is called the latent period and in many cases, the cancer is not diagnosed until after we retire.

We also just see a lot of bad stuff in general. Things that most people will never experience in their lifetime. This is called post-traumatic stress and in some cases, leads to medical issues towards the end of our career.

Firefighters, who have risked their lives and health for years and who already suffer cancer and PTSD at rates far higher than the general public, will now be denied a voice in any opportunity whatsoever to secure their health in retirement.

We fully understand and accept the risks when we hire on the job. But, all we want to know is that we have the resources available to deal with those challenges.

During our years of service, Fire Fighters have deferred wage gains and other benefits in order to minimize the impact of the skyrocketing increases in health care costs. This mandate by the State, would effectively prevent Fire Fighters from making these concessions should they have no hope of negotiating for their health security in retirement.

Without the ability to negotiate retiree health care, this law will certainly make it more difficult to attract and retain fire fighters. Recruitment is already a problem statewide and this will only make it worse.

This is a local issue and one that needs to be dealt with at the local level. In the past, almost all local governments just paid their medical claims as they came in. This is called a "pay as you go" funding practice. This is allowed, as there is NO requirement that these benefits are prefunded like pensions are required to be. GASB changed their accounting practices approximately 10 years ago and required that the liability be carried on the local government's balance sheets. This exposed the large unfunded liabilities that we are seeing now. This was done to encourage prefunding and it has worked. Most communities have started prefunding those benefits, but it will take time. This will not be fixed overnight.

There is no reason for the state to come in and impose their will on local governments that are dealing with this issue. The state should also not take any action on health care until Congress has sorted out what actions will be taken on the Affordable Care Act, as doing so could put Fire Fighters at risk of being doubly jeopardized. For example, if a new bill doesn't protect against pre-existing conditions some fire fighters may never get health care again.

If you pass this bill, firefighters will lose their retiree health care, which will leave them with little choice but to stay working and face further injuries and exposures. Research has proven that the rate of injuries for firefighters increases with age. I'm also pretty sure no one wants a 65-year-old firefighter responding to their emergency.

We urge you to not support this bill. Keep it a local control issue which will allow the communities to determine what works for them and their firefighters. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify.

I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.