

FEDERAL FIRE FIGHTER SICK LEAVE

The IAFF supports the FERS sick leave credit recently signed into law, and also supports allowing federal fire fighters and other federal employees to donate sick leave.

BACKGROUND

For federal fire fighters, sick leave is an important protection that gives them a brief reprieve from work to recuperate from an illness so they can return to work healthy and fully recovered. Federal firefighters have encountered two primary weaknesses in the current sick leave system for federal employees.

First, federal fire fighters need the ability to donate sick leave to fellow employees. Under current law, federal fire fighters and other federal employees can donate their annual leave to fellow employees to give their fellow employees the time they need to fully recuperate before returning to work.

Unfortunately, federal employees do not enjoy this same flexibility with their sick leave. Federal firefighters often use their sick leave more quickly than other employees in order to recover from ailments and other conditions directly or indirectly related to the occupational stresses and other physical challenges experienced on the job. Giving federal employees the ability to donate sick leave would alleviate the time pressures that sometimes result in federal fire fighters and other employees returning to work before they fully recover from health ailments.

Second, all federal employees deserve a sick leave benefit at retirement. Employees who joined the federal government before 1986 (CSRS employees) earn a credit in their retirement annuity for unused sick leave. Employees who began their federal service after 1986 (FERS employees) are subject to a "use-it or lose-it" sick leave policy and do not receive any retirement credit. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimates that the FERS approach to sick leave costs taxpayers \$68 million per year in lost productivity and increased training expenses.

CURRENT LEGISLATION

House: H.R. 2647, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010

Sponsor: Representative Ike Skelton (D-MO)

Summary: H.R. 2647 authorized Department of Defense (DoD) programs for FY 2010. The bill included a provision crediting employees under the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) for their unused sick leave upon retirement but did not provide added flexibility for sick leave donation.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

On October 28, 2009, President Obama signed H.R. 2647 into law.