

From the Desk of State Representative Salinas

Andrea Salinas



Fire Fighters SAY YES on HB 2005B!

On behalf of the Oregon State Firefighters Council, we give our full support for HB 2005, Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML). Fire departments have been responding to accidents and medical emergencies for decades; however, many people are unaware of the critical role firefighters play in medical emergencies as first responders. A common perception is that a firefighter's primary tools are a fire hose and axe. The reality is that firefighters are equally familiar with administering an electric shock and drugs to restart a heart, inserting a breathing tube, or extricating an accident victim from a crushed vehicle while simultaneously treating their injuries.

We see firsthand how these kinds of unexpected emergencies put families in great stress, physically, emotionally and financially. We see people who rush home from work because a family member has been in some sort of medical emergency, only to return to work once their beloved family member is rushed to the hospital because they can't afford the time off. We see how much financial limitations prevent someone from being with a loved one in a time of need and during a medical emergency. We see children left in the hospital alone because their parents can't afford the time off to be with them. These families need paid family and medical leave insurance.

Oregon Firefighters and their families also need paid family and medical leave. Our members are on the front lines every day taking care of those in need. And in doing so, they jeopardize their own health and safety. The dangers at a fire scene are obvious: fire, smoke, building collapse, explosions. However, there is also a big unseen danger: cancer. Today's fires involve plastics, which are in everything—carpeting, furniture, TVs, appliances, combs, bottles, and even pipes and other building materials. When plastics burn, they typically produce much more smoke and heat than comparable wood products. Plastic smoke is also more deadly and may include carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, nitrogen oxides, ammonia, phenol, benzene, hydrogen chloride, hydrochloric acid, methane, and even hydrogen cyanide. As a result, firefighters have much higher rates of cancer, leukemia, and multiple myeloma.

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Firefighter Mark Noble, who died of brain cancer, compiled the statistics below.¹ They compare the likelihood of firefighters developing the following cancers to that of the general population:

- Brain cancer: 3.5 times more likely in firefighters with 10 to 19 years of experience.
- Leukemia/lymphoma: three times more likely.
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma: two times more likely.
- Multiple myeloma: 2.25 times more likely; after 30 years, 10 times.
- Bladder cancer: three times more likely.
- Kidney cancer: four times more likely.
- Prostate cancer: two times more likely.
- Testicular cancer: 2.5 times more likely.
- Colorectal cancer (large intestine): two times more likely.
- Liver cancer: two times more likely.
- Skin cancer: two times more likely.

These illnesses put great strain on firefighters and their families, who also need paid family and medical leave. No one wants to be alone when facing a serious illness and we will all need care from a family member at some point in our lives. Nobody should have to sacrifice their own or their families economic security when dealing with serious health conditions. Please support HB 2005 and pass Paid Family and Medical Leave insurance program that will benefit families all across Oregon.

Rules Committee, on behalf of the over 3500 career fire fighters and paramedics of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council, we urge a Do Pass of House Bill 2005 and on to the floor.

Respectfully,

Karl Koenig /s

Karl Koenig

¹ Gagliano, M., C. Phillips, P. Jose, and S. Bernocco. Air Management for the Fire Service (Fire Engineering, 2007), 139.