



Testimony of

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On

H.R. 413  
The Public Safety Employer-Employee  
Cooperation Act of 2009

Before the

Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor  
and Pensions  
Committee on Education and Labor  
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The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) represents 1.4 million dedicated men and woman throughout North America, including a significant number of law enforcement officers. The IBT's Public Services Division oversees the Teamsters Law Enforcement League, (TLEL), which provides assistance to police, corrections and public safety officers, as well as sheriff's deputies, seeking effective legal representation and an experienced voice on matters of importance, such as wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Congress has, on several occasions, attempted to address the needs of law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and first responders through the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act. This should be the year that real justice is achieved for those who have selflessly carried out their responsibilities under such arduous and often life-threatening conditions.

### Truly Honoring Their Dedication

Many accolades are frequently offered by elected officials in recognition of the valiant men and women who serve and protect us. Is it not disingenuous to speak of the courage displayed by law enforcement officers, fire fighters and first responders in one breath, and then argue

against passage of what should be a basic right in the United States of America?

When a crime is being committed, a building is burning, or people are seriously injured in an act of terrorism, collective bargaining agreements have never gotten in the way of getting the job done.

As we begin the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is time to truly honor the dedication of our local heroes by passing a federal law requiring all states to afford these specific public employees--who have democratically chosen their workplace representatives--the opportunity to negotiate their wages, benefits and working conditions.

Collective Bargaining Facilitates Workplace Innovation  
Which Benefits the Public

Law enforcement officers, fire fighters and first responders are on the front lines on a daily basis; as such, their experience can offer valuable insight into ways to better protect and serve the public. The volumes of evidence on high performing organizations highlight the important role that employee engagement plays in identifying workplace problems and improving performance.

A statutory framework for collective bargaining will provide the necessary legal guarantees to ensure that the aforementioned public safety

officers will be able to negotiate appropriate arrangements to improve the delivery of services to the public with a special focus on cost-effectiveness.

Denying a voice fosters a disengaged workforce and serves to perpetuate an “exit strategy” resulting in high turnover and the loss of critical knowledge. Without unionized protection, which is reinforced through the collective bargaining process, fear about exercising a voice becomes more prevalent. Allowing such a system to continue is not sound public policy and will put our communities at risk.

With Fair Legal Standards,  
Neither Side Can Monopolize the Process

Existing state laws that permit collective bargaining on behalf of public employees typically include requirements that establish standards for good faith negotiations. One opponent of H.R. 413 has asserted without credible evidence, that passage of the legislation will result in “monopolistic bargaining.” While such terminology is undefined, it clearly ignores the bilateral nature of collective bargaining in the public sector.

In addition to creating a process for addressing workplace concerns, collective bargaining can be an effective way to promote stability within a police department, because it allows for constructive input on economic interests—i.e., the setting of wages and benefits. Since most agreements are multi-year in duration, law enforcement officers in states that allow

collective bargaining have a level of predictability on future compensation and can better manage their financial matters.

### Conclusion

The principles embodied within H.R. 413 are essential rights that all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and first responders should have. It creates the opportunity for cooperation through collective bargaining, while not mandating the adoption of specific employment conditions. The legislation establishes the correct balance between national standards and the important role that states and localities will play in implementing the law, when public safety officers vote for union representation.