



# INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

**2<sup>ND</sup> DISTRICT – SERVING MISSOURI, IOWA, KANSAS, AND NEBRASKA**

KURT BECKER · IAFF DISTRICT FIELD SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

MOBILE (314) 393-9760 · [Kurt.Becker@iaff2665.org](mailto:Kurt.Becker@iaff2665.org)



## **Memorandum**

**Date:** January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**To:** Ms. Margrace Buckler, Human Resources Director – City of Columbia, Missouri

**Cc:** Mr. Travis Gregory, President – IAFF Local 1055

**From:** Kurt Becker – International Association of Fire Fighters

**Re:** Items of Fiscal Consequence for FY2018

Dear Ms. Buckler –

As articulated in the memo to commence bargaining that we provided to the City of Columbia (“City”) on January 4, 2017, it is the desire of IAFF Local 1055 (“Local”) to begin the collective bargaining process with the City as soon as possible. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to address the City Council on February 20, 2017 regarding the items of fiscal consequence relating to the City’s FY2018 budget process that will be contained in the Local’s proposed Collective Bargaining Agreement (“CBA”), and we look forward to making that presentation.

To make this dialogue with the City Council as productive as possible, we will be separating our talking points into two broad categories – Compliance with National Standards and Guidelines, and, Competitiveness in the Missouri Municipal Fire Department Marketplace. Under the Compliance heading, we will explore the various national standards and guidelines that govern our industry, and we will discuss how the positions put forth in the Union’s proposal endeavor to assist the Columbia Fire Department (“CFD”) in meeting those standards. Under the Competitiveness heading, we will review the Missouri municipal fire department marketplace, we will discuss in detail the salaries and benefits of the CFD as compared to the market, and we will explore the proposals put forth by the Local as it relates to the CFD’s position in the market.

## **Compliance with National Standards and Guidelines**

The American fire service is largely governed by two separate agencies – the National Fire Protection Association (“NFPA”) and the Insurance Services Office (“ISO”). NFPA establishes all the standards for the fire service, ranging from how a fire truck should be built and what should be on it, to the qualifications for a professional fire fighter, to the relevant fire related building codes. ISO is a rating tool for insurance companies that assesses the effectiveness of a fire department from a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being the best) and based on that scale, many insurance companies establish the rates homeowners and businesses pay for products such as property insurance.

## **CBA Proposal on Apparatus Staffing**

The Local will be proposing that the minimum daily staffing of the CFD be no less than sixty-two (62) on duty personnel. Presently the minimum daily staffing of the CFD is



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thirty-six (36) personnel. This proposal is based on the national safe staffing standards set forth in the 2016 revision of NFPA 1710 – Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operation to the Public by Career Fire Departments. *See attached.*

The staffing standards set forth in NFPA 1710 very clearly call for a minimum daily staffing of four (4) personnel on an Engine Company, Ladder Truck Company, or Heavy Rescue Squad when those units are responding to incidents in “**low-risk**” regions of the City, and where the responding units arrive within four (4) minutes of being dispatched. NFPA 1710 goes on to articulate that when a company is responding to regions with “**geographic restrictions**” that prevent arrival within four (4) minutes, companies must be staffed with five (5) personnel. Finally, NFPA 1710 states that companies responding to regions defined as “**high hazard**” (high-rise buildings, densely populated living quarters, schools, medical facilities, etc.) should be staffed with six (6) personnel.

The CFD presently staffs nine (9) Engine Companies with three (3) personnel each, two (2) Ladder Truck Companies with three (3) personnel each, a Heavy Rescue Squad with two (2) personnel, one (1) Battalion Chief and one (1) Division Chief with one (1) member each. In its present configuration, the staffing of the CFD in no way meets the minimum safe staffing standards set forth in NFPA 1710.

It can certainly be argued that there are regions of the City where manufacturing facilities, nursing homes, and other use groups would justifiably constitute “high hazard” occupancies. Further, it is clear that not all of Columbia’s residents and businesses fall within the four-minute response window. Those factors notwithstanding, the Local intends to focus its recommendation on ensuring that the portion of the City with the highest risk, also has the highest amount of resources concentrated in that response area.

CFD Stations 1, 2, and 3 serve the downtown and main campus regions of the City. Within those response areas lie the highest number of the City’s high-rise buildings, and the highest density of its permanent and educational residents. Each of those three (3) stations house an Engine Company and either a Ladder Truck Company, or a Heavy Rescue Squad. Because there is no way to consider the response areas of Stations 1, 2, and 3 as anything other than high hazard, the **Local is proposing that all six (6) of those companies have a minimum daily staffing of six (6) personnel.** Stations 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 generally serve portions of the City with lower risk profiles, and each of those stations house a single Engine Company. Therefore, the **Local is proposing that that all six (6) of those companies have a minimum daily staffing of four (4) personnel.**

Factoring in the Battalion Chief and Division Chief, in order to comply with NFPA 1710, the City must adopt a staffing policy that ensures that a minimum of sixty-two (62) personnel are on duty each day. To ensure that there is sufficient staffing to cover personnel being absent due to duty-related injuries, training, and the use of earned leave, **the Local is proposing that all three shifts have a standing force size of seventy-four**



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**(74) full-time personnel per shift, or two hundred and twenty-two (222) full-time, front-line fire fighting personnel assigned to emergency response operations.**

NFPA based these minimum safe staffing standards on extensive research completed by the National Institute of Safety and Health (“NIST”), *see attached*, which conducted series of scientific tests to determine the effects crew size had on fire suppression. ISO recognizes that crew size significantly impacts a fire department’s ability to quickly extinguish a fire, limit fire spread, and limit property damage. Because of that correlation, ISO provides escalating credit to agencies that meet, or exceed national safe staffing standards. This escalating credit is a primary determiner in ISO’s rating of a fire department, and while adding personnel sufficient to comply with the minimum safe staffing standards in NFPA 1710 will certainly come an associated financial burden, it is reasonable to expect that the impact to taxpayers will at least partially be offset by a corresponding decrease in property insurance rates.

### **CBA Proposal Physical Fitness and Wellness**

The Local will be proposing that the City provide annual comprehensive medical physicals that comply with NFPA 1582 – Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments. *See attached.*

NFPA 1582 firmly places the responsibility of providing annual medical physicals for fire fighters on the shoulders of the employer. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) developed the Wellness-Fitness Initiative (WFI) approximately 15 years ago to assist fire departments nationwide in complying with NFPA 1582. Because cancer, heart attacks, and strokes are leading causes of line of duty deaths in the fire service, it is critical that all professional fire fighters receive these medical evaluations on an annual basis.

In order to comply with NFPA 1582, the CFD would need to contract with a regional service provider to provide annual medical screening for its personnel.

### **Competitiveness in the Missouri Municipal FD Marketplace**

Competitiveness in the marketplace is an amalgamation of a number of factors, but can generally be broken into two broad categories – Compensation and Benefits. Compensation typically refers to the actual wages earned for the work performed. Benefits typically refer to items like vacation leave, sick leave, health insurance, pension benefits, and similar provisions.

### **Employee Compensation**

The Fire Fighters of the CFD consistently rank in the bottom half to bottom third of peer municipalities in the state of Missouri. It is the position of the Local that the City should allocate funds sufficient in the FY2018 budget to adjust the Fire Fighter pay scale sufficiently to bring this scale to average/median of peer municipalities. Columbia is a



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premier city, and it is geographically and demographically close enough to the metropolitan regions of Kansas City, Springfield, and St. Louis that it must recognize that in order to attract and retrain top quality, professional first responders, Columbia must commit at least being average when compared to those peers.

The Local asserts that the citizens of Columbia place a high value on the services provided by our members. That assertion is reflected by the consistently high ratings received by the CFD on the citizen surveys conducted by the City. The values of this community, while fiscally conservative, are fair and reasonable. It is our position that our members should be compensated at a rate at least consistent with the average wages of our peers, and it is our position that such an objective is consistent with the values of the citizens of Columbia.

There are three main factors that have led to the CFD's lack of competitiveness in the marketplace. First, and foremost, the structure of the pay plan for uniformed personnel is outdated, inefficient, and very much out of step with our peers. Secondly, the pay plan has not been properly maintained and monitored to ensure that it remains in step with the market. Finally, there exists so much overlap between the compensation in the various grades that it is not at all uncommon for a supervisor to be making less than the employees he or she is supervising.

### **Ineffective Salary Structure**

To address the ineffective salary structure, the Local will be proposing to replace the current "open" pay plan with a structured "step plan" in which employees move from the entry salary to the base salary for a fully-trained employee (or top salary) in a set amount of time. Such step plans are used in the overwhelming majority of municipal fire and police departments throughout the state, and by failing to replace the outdated and ineffective "open" pay plan, the City has no chance of being anywhere close to average when it comes to compensating its front-line first responders. The Local's proposal will replace the current system with a ten (10) step plan, with each step representing a year of service to the City. In implementing this plan, the Local will propose that tenured employees not being compensated at the appropriate level be moved to the step in the plan that most accurately reflects their tenure with the City.

### **Lack of Compensation System Maintenance**

To address the lack of maintenance to the pay plan, the Local will be proposing that the current pay ranges be utilized as the entry salary and base pay for the various pay grades for FY2018, and that for FY2019, FY2020, and FY2021 a 2% market adjustment be applied to those ranges to ensure that the CFD does not continue to fall behind its peers in terms of compensation.

### **Pay Grade Overlap**

Addressing this issue of pay grade overlap simply requires a policy change. To that end, the Local will be proposing that the City adopt a policy which ensures that there be a



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minimum of a 5% difference between the starting pay of each promoted grade and the base salary for a full-trained employee in the grade below. Further, the Local will propose that for promoted positions, there shall be no more than four (4) steps between the entry salary of the promoted pay grade and the base salary for that grade.

### **Employee Benefits**

The members of the CFD are generally satisfied with the current state of the benefits associated with their employment with the City. With a few notable exceptions detailed herein, the Local will simply be seeking to codify its current benefits through the collective bargaining process. Those exceptions are as follows:

### **Designating Earned Time Used as Time Worked for the Purpose of FLSA Overtime Calculations**

The present practice of the CFD is to not pay overtime at the rate of time and a half for hours exceeding 216 in a 28-day pay cycle in which an employee utilizes earned leave of any sort. This practice is unnecessary and serves as a disincentive for personnel to volunteer to work additional shifts when they have vacation or other leave planned, and more troubling, incentivizes employees to come to work sick so as not to suffer the financial hardship associated with using earned leave during pay cycles in which the employee is scheduled for an additional duty shift. It is the position of the Local that the City should allocate the funds necessary in the FY2018 budget to remunerate all CFD employees at one and one half times their base rate of pay for all hours worked or leave taken in excess of 216 in a given 28 day pay cycle.

### **Sick Leave and On-Duty Injuries**

Presently, the use of sick leave due to duty-related injuries is used against employees on their annual performance evaluation. The Local will be proposing to do away with this practice. Additionally, in its present form, the City's policy forbids employees from claiming injuries that occur on duty as a duty related injury which would be covered by workers compensation unless the injuries fall into very specific criteria. The Local and IAFF believe that policy to be of very questionable legal standing, and will be proposing that any and all injuries that occur on duty be considered as duty related and claimable as workers compensation eligible occurrences. Further, the Local will be proposing presumptive language that acknowledges that first responders, and in particular fire fighters, have a much higher likelihood of contracting numerous forms of cancer, communicable diseases, and certain behavioral health conditions as a result of occupational exposures, and therefore ensuring that illnesses resulting from those exposures shall be covered through the workers compensation system provided by the City.

### **Meal Allowance**

Presently, the City remunerates on duty members of the CFD a daily meal allowance of \$13.00, and that amount has not been adjusted for several years. The Local will be



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proposing that the daily meal allowance be increased to \$15.00 per member per day to adjust for increased costs associated with food acquisition.

We look forward to discussing these items with the City Council at length as well as setting forth a timeline for the CBA negotiations. Please contact me at your earliest convenience to set up meeting times that work for your team. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration!

Very truly yours,

Kurt Becker  
International Association of Fire Fighters