



Federal Firefighters Families First Act

Section by Section

Background:

While most Americans work a 40-hour workweek, the Fair Labor Standards Act establishes a 53-hour workweek for our nation's firefighters. However, firefighters protecting Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and other federal facilities typically work a 72-hour workweek. This schedule typically includes 19 hours of pre-scheduled overtime and does not account for mandatory overtime over their scheduled 72-hour work week. These firefighters commonly work three 24-hour shifts per week. This schedule effectively denies these firefighters a meaningful work-life balance and is a significant contributing factor to burnout.

These firefighters' hourly rate of pay is computed by dividing the annual rate of basic pay (based on the GS scale) by 2,756 hours (an annualized total which reflects the 53-hour FLSA workweek and excludes their scheduled overtime). In comparison, local and state firefighters work as low as a 42-hour workweek and receive significantly higher hourly wages – a disparity which exacerbates the federal government's recruitment and retention challenges for firefighters.

Additionally, despite working 19 hours of scheduled overtime per month and receiving time-and-a-half pay for these hours, these firefighters' pensions only value these scheduled overtime hours at their basic pay. The failure to recognize the true value of scheduled overtime hours denies firefighters thousands of dollars in earned retirement savings.

Section 1: Short Title

- Establishes a title of the Federal Firefighters Families First Act
- States that the purpose of the legislation is to establish a more regular and sustainable workweek for firefighters protecting Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and other federal facilities while also correcting their pension benefit calculation to reflect the full value of their work schedules.

Section 2:

- Changes the calculation formula for these firefighters' hourly wage by requiring it to be determined by dividing the yearly GS rate by 2080 (the 40-hour workweek which is utilized by nearly all other federal employees). This will ensure that wage comparisons for these firefighters are more straightforward.

Section 3:

- Adjusts the FERS calculation for firefighters to recognize the full wages paid to a firefighter for their 19 hours of scheduled overtime, rather than only valuing these hours at their basic rate of pay. This section maintains current FERS policies of not accounting for unscheduled overtime when determining a firefighter's FERS benefit.

Section 4:

- Directs OPM to establish a 60-hour workweek for firefighters protecting federal facilities, thereby reducing their scheduled overtime from 19 hours per week to 7 hours per week. This change would hold these firefighters' current overall pay steady and they would still be able to work additional overtime assignments; however, these would not be included in their basic work schedule.