

## Fire Fighter Collective Bargaining Bill Passes House Committee

*Submitted by: James Carney, OAPFF*

The Ohio House passed HB 271 which would ensure collective bargaining rights for town-ships with a population less than 5000 but provide fire service for as many as 40,000 residents. That passage was an important first step in passing the bill into law.

With its beginning in the Township committee of the OAPFF in the early 2000 s under the guidance of then Committee Chair Jim Carney and then Legislative Director Mark Sanders this bill has encountered adversity.

"This is an important piece of legislation," stated OAPFF President Mark Sanders. "Our goal throughout the years has been to see the loophole in ORC 4117 closed and the process to do that has now begun."

During testimony in the State House, the OAPFF saw support from a number of sources. Among those testifying before the Commerce and Labor Committee were Governmental Affairs Director Carney, Fire Chief Bates of Madison Township representing the Fire Chiefs Association and a host of Local Affiliate Leaders.

According to President Sanders, "Those Local Affiliate Leaders were instrumental in passing this bill. Like the Beatles said, 'We get by with a little help from our friends.' Well our friends came through for us during this process."

"It was great to see our members turn out. This is what unionism and political action is about. I was proud to see the support of our brothers and sisters," added S/T Mark Horton.

Through a coordinated effort, local leaders spoke on a variety of topics. Washington Township Local 3036 President Don Schleich demonstrated the flaws of ORC 4117 under the current application of the language given today's growing urban areas. Jackson Township Local 2672 President Scott Harr reviewed the latest court decision concerning the issue. That judicial review illustrated instances where there was disparity in the statute. Norwich Township Local 1723 President Brian Gatley testified that due to the lack of protection under ORC 4117, the township stonewalled and then abruptly stopped negotiations leaving the fire fighters with no recourse in obtaining an agreement.



*Ohio AFL-CIO Chief of Staff Tim Burga (front row right) joined fire fighters in getting HB 271 passed out of committee in helping to give these dedicated public servants a voice on the job.*

Outside help also came from Daphne Hawk (R-Jackson Township Trustee-Elect) who stated that she was shocked that fire fighters had no legal process to sit and discuss matters of any kind with their employers without the threat of retaliation, the same reason Lo-cal 2672 endorsed her campaign. Dennis Nicodemus (D-Truro Town-ship Trustee) testified in support of collective bargaining commenting that it has worked well in his jurisdiction. Nicodemus added that politics and elections should not change the proven process of collective bargaining.

The Ohio AFL-CIO has been unwavering in their support of OAPFF efforts. President Joe Rugola and Chief of Staff Tim Burga have stood shoulder to shoulder with Ohio's Professional Fire Fighters. In fact, they have been so passionate in their advocacy of our members right to bargain collectively that it seemed as though passage impacted them as much as our members.

"The AFL-CIO has been out front of this since the beginning. We cannot thank them enough," said Director Carney.

"Thus far, we have been successful by bringing together OAPFF affiliate leaders, the Ohio Federation of Labor, the Ohio Fire Chiefs, and elected officials both Republican and Democrat to support and advocate for this bill. I believe, if we get our fair shot in the Senate, we can bring this issue to final passage. We are up to the challenge," concluded President Sanders.

OAPFF, Local Affiliate Leaders and AFL-CIO work together to pass House Bill 271.