

October 15, 2015

Re: Opposition to the Furthering Asbestos Claim Transparency Act (H.R. 526 and S. 357)

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned organizations dedicated to serving our nation's first responders, including firefighters, emergency medical technicians, teachers and millions of other public employees strongly oppose H.R. 526 and S. 357 the "Furthering Asbestos Claim Transparency Act," introduced by Rep. Blake Farenthold (R-TX-27) and Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.). Both H.R. 526 and S. 357 will drain critical resources that have been set aside to secure justice for victims of asbestos diseases while simultaneously publishing those victims' personal information on the Internet.

There are roughly 10 million first responders in the United States, many of whom are volunteers. All of these brave men and women put their lives on the line each and every day to keep their communities safe.

Although first responders understand and accept many of the risks inherent to their professions, they often face less-obvious threats that can have long-term, even fatal impacts, not the least of which is asbestos exposure.

Asbestos is one of the most lethal substances known to man and is found in nearly all homes, schools and other buildings built before the early 1980s. When asbestos fibers are released into the air, which often occurs when structures are damaged by fire, they can be easily inhaled and lodged into the lungs. A single exposure can cause asbestos-related disease, including deadly and painful asbestosis and mesothelioma.

In fact, a recent report by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found that firefighters are twice as likely as the general population to contract mesothelioma, an incurable malignancy of the lungs and other organs caused only by asbestos exposure. The NIOSH team reviewed mortality and cancer incidence for 30,000 firefighters in Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco from 1950 and 2009 and found a direct link between their jobs and several types of cancer, including mesothelioma.

In addition, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's "Work-Related Lung Disease Surveillance Report" for 2007, the latest year available, noted that elementary school teachers are more than twice as likely to die from mesothelioma than Americans as a whole. Teachers' mortality rate from the disease is less than that among

construction workers, but it's higher than for workers in other occupations known for elevated rates of exposure, such as the chemical industry and railroads.

Any schools built before 1980 likely contain asbestos. A recent report by the *Washington Post* published on Aug. 6 shined a light on the continued threat asbestos poses to teachers, students and other employees at many of the nation's schools.

Victims of asbestos exposure, including first responders and teachers, among many other dedicated public employees, are entitled to compensation from the companies that caused their illnesses. Both H.R. 526 and S. 357, however, would give companies an unfair advantage over asbestos victims seeking justice for their injuries — speciously touted as a “transparency bill,” the measure actually is designed to help the asbestos industry avoid paying victims through delay tactics and waste of scarce trust resources set aside for victims. To add insult to injury, H.R. 526 and S. 357 also would expose those same victims to unwanted invasions of privacy and possibly identity theft. Our nation's first responders, teachers and public employees dying of asbestos diseases deserve more respect and better treatment from Congress.

That is why we, the undersigned organizations, strongly oppose this legislation. We further call on members of Congress to stand with our first responders, teachers and other victims of asbestos diseases and oppose H.R. 526 and S. 357.

Sincerely,

International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)

National Education Association (NEA)

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)