

PRESS RELEASE

North Kingstown Fire Fighters Respond To RI Supreme Court Ruling On Firefighter Platoon Structure

The North Kingstown Fire Fighters, IAFF Local 1651 (NKFFA) received a Supreme Court ruling today regarding the platoon structure of the North Kingstown Fire Department. The decision states that while the Town possesses the management right to determine the department's organizational structure, it does not have the right to change firefighters' work hours and wages. Hours and wages, like other working conditions, are subject to negotiation and arbitration under the Fire Fighters Arbitration Act. It is the hours and working conditions that firefighters are most concerned about.

"Today's ruling from the Supreme Court was not entirely unexpected, as it only involves the platoon structure, which has never been our concern" stated Raymond Furtado, President of the NKFFA. "Our position has always centered on our hours of work, coupled with the lack of appropriate personnel to perform our commitment to the residents safely. Further, the decision does not address the employment of bad-faith bargaining by the previous Town Council, as was clearly established through two decisions of the RI State Labor Relations Board after a year of extensive hearings, evidence, and testimony."

"While we have yet to review the decision with our attorneys in detail, I am very encouraged by the Court's finding that the Town must comply with the bargaining requirements of the FFAA regarding wages, hours and working conditions. We currently have three contracts pending in interest arbitration, and it is now apparent those hearings will determine our wages, hours, and working conditions for the years in question. It is there that we will make our case for safer working conditions. We are on the right side of the issue morally and ethically, and although the Town reversed its commitment to waive the timelines that led to today's decision in their favor, we remain undeterred in our commitment to ensuring our safety, and in turn, the safety of our residents. This dangerous experiment needs to end once and for all."

Although the Court held today that the 2011-2012 contract year is not subject to arbitration, the parties are currently engaged in contract arbitrations for years 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, and are in negotiations for 2015-16. Today's decision impacts the terms and conditions of employment for the period March 11, 2012 through June 30, 2012. There has been no timetable established for the remaining Supreme Court appeals, including the State Labor Board's decision finding that the Town acted in bad faith in its dealings with the firefighters since the fall of 2012.

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