

## The erosion of police and firefighter wage parity

*Wage parity for police and firefighters has eroded steadily since 1950, long before concern surfaced about the civil disorders of the 1960's and, more recently, about crime*

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The close affiliation and alliance between police and fire services in the U.S. governmental structure is both unusual and administratively fascinating. Clearly, these two mainstream government services differ markedly in purpose and function. Yet, historically, they have become closely aligned under the rubric of "public safety." Wage parity between the two professions is as old as their creation. Formal police and fire departments did not emerge until the mid-1800's. Wage parity is documented to nearly the inception of these departments—for example, in New York since 1898 and in Detroit since 1907.<sup>1</sup> Since 1950, however, wage parity for police and firefighters has eroded steadily, benefiting police, who had been paid less. The contention that parity should be maintained rests on several arguments: firefighting is at least as dangerous and stressful as, and probably more so, than police work; opportunities to supplement their salary with overtime and outside employment are available to police, but not to firefighters; and police enjoy better after-retirement employment opportunities.

This article discusses post-World War II pay developments for police and firefighters. Despite differences in specific tasks, police and fire services are functions of public safety. Indeed, in several communities, police and fire services are combined into a public safety agency. In some cases, this involves merely integration at the top management levels, but in a number of sizable cities (for example, Durham, North Carolina, and Kalamazoo, Michigan), the operational services also are integrated. Integration of the two services is premised upon their broad similarities.

Both services are similarly organized, employing a quasi-military structure and using military titles such as lieutenant and captain. For generations, they have had similar, if not identical, personnel recruitment requirements. Both services involve physical hazards and emotional stress. Because of the physically hazardous nature of the work, the physical stress involved, and the emotional stress, the two services are organized to provide early retirement. Indeed, police and fire pension systems are frequently unified and provide a retirement option at 20 or 25 years of service, rather than at age 65. Numerous State statutes equate police and fire services; for example, civil service statutes and so-called heart-and-lung bills, which establish a presumption that cardiovascular disease among police and firefighter incumbents is job related, are similar in many States. Most importantly, however, police and fire services serve the same ultimate purpose: maintaining public safety and an orderly society.

### Wage parity in major jurisdictions

Historically, studies of wage parity have focused only on major municipal jurisdictions in the United States. Rough parity exists in most of the major jurisdictions. In 1990, exact parity existed in 17 of the 30 jurisdictions. (See table 1.) In Indianapolis, firefighters were paid slightly more than police. In 9 of the remaining 12 jurisdictions, the maximum base salary for firefighters was between 95 percent and 100 percent of that for police officers.

However, even these data may be slightly misleading. In many jurisdictions, nonsupervisory

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line positions are available in the fire department, although they may not necessarily be available in the police department. These positions, generally chauffeur, driver, or engineering jobs, create an opportunity for firefighters to be paid more in base wages than most of their counterparts in the police department.

When 1984 maximum base wages for nonsupervisory roles are compared, it is seen that firefighter salaries were higher in 13 of the 20 most populous cities and at parity in 5; police pay was higher in only 2 cities. (See exhibit 1.) Parity existed in 8 of the 20 cities for first-line supervisors, generally sergeants in police departments and lieutenants in fire departments. Six cities paid more to the police supervisor than the fire service counterpart, while 6 cities paid a higher salary to the fire supervisor. (See exhibit 2.)

Finally, in a review of the March 1990 base wages in the 10 most populous municipalities,<sup>2</sup> parity was essentially found in 8 cities. San Antonio, Texas, paid firefighters more to start, but paid police more at maximum. Firefighters in Phoenix, Arizona, were paid 95 percent of the wages of police officers. Thus, parity existed either roughly or exactly in 9 of the top 10 municipal jurisdictions in the country. (See table 2.) One might conclude that parity is being rigidly maintained.

However, the extent of parity may be misrepresented by focusing only on major municipalities. We reviewed the annual minimum and maximum salaries for police and firefighters every 10 years from 1950 through 1990 for a range of sizes of municipalities, as reported by the International City Management Association. The review focused on maximum salaries. Minimum starting salaries for police and firefighters are a less reliable measure of parity, because some jurisdictions report the salaries of cadets or recruits, while others report the salary of a public safety employee who has completed training at the academy. If the reported maximum salaries for police and firefighters were within 5 percent of each other, we considered parity to exist. We chose the 5-percent figure to correct for errors in reporting and minor variations in reimbursements for equipment purchases. This liberal definition would overstate rather than understate the degree of parity. (See exhibit 3.)

For each of the five reporting periods, we computed the percentages of cities in which police and firefighter salaries were at parity, those in which police salaries were greater, and those in which firefighter salaries were greater. (See chart 1.)

In 1950 and 1960, parity existed in nearly 90 percent of the jurisdictions that reported. In 1970, the percentage dropped to 54 percent, and then it continued to drop to 51 percent in 1980 and to 36 percent in 1990. While only 7 percent of the jurisdictions paid the police a higher salary in 1950, the percentage rose to 57 percent in 1990. On the other hand, firefighters received higher salaries throughout the 40-year period in only 4 percent to 12 percent of the jurisdictions.

**Table 1. Comparison of firefighter maximum base salary without longevity, as a percent of police officer salary, 30 largest U.S. cities, 1990**

[In percent]	
City	Salary rate
New York .....	100.0
Los Angeles .....	100.0
Chicago .....	100.0
Houston .....	100.0
Philadelphia .....	100.0
Detroit .....	100.0
San Diego .....	100.0
Dallas .....	100.0
San Antonio .....	97.3
Phoenix .....	95.0
Baltimore .....	95.9
San Francisco .....	100.0
Indianapolis .....	101.1
San Jose .....	95.6
Memphis .....	97.8
Washington .....	100.0
Jacksonville .....	80.3
Milwaukee .....	100.0
Boston .....	100.0
Columbus .....	89.6
New Orleans .....	100.0
Denver .....	100.0
El Paso .....	82.2
Seattle .....	98.4
Kansas City .....	96.4
St. Louis .....	100.0
Atlanta .....	100.0
Cincinnati .....	98.0
Pittsburgh .....	94.8
Cleveland .....	100.0

Source: International Association of Fire Fighters, IAFF "Parity Kit," 1990.

A further analysis of the data was conducted to determine whether the incidence of parity varied by size of city. Three sizes of cities were compared: large (500,000 or more), medium sized (100,000 to 499,999), and small (less than 100,000). (See chart 2.) Medium-sized cities diverged somewhat from the pattern, but not significantly. In medium-sized cities, parity existed in all of the jurisdictions that reported in 1950, but it obtained in 94 percent in 1960 and in just 45 percent in 1970. In 1980, 67 percent of the jurisdictions that responded reported parity, but the percentage dropped to 33 percent in 1990. Police were not paid a higher salary in 1950 or 1960 in any of the jurisdictions that responded, but in 1970, 50 percent of the jurisdictions reported that they paid police more. In 1980, the number of medium-sized jurisdictions reporting higher salaries for police fell to 17 percent, but the figure rose to 60 percent in 1990. No jurisdictions reported paying firefighters higher salaries in 1950, but approximately 5 percent did in 1960 and 1970. The percentage increased to 17 percent in 1980, but then declined to 7 percent in 1990. A detailed analysis revealed that the anomalous 1980 figure may have been the result of the small number of jurisdictions reporting that year.

## Issues pertaining to parity

Wage parity between the two professions began at their inception, in the mid-1800's.<sup>3</sup> Arguments pertaining to the propriety of wage parity between police officers and firefighters have remained relatively the same for a century. However, before 1970, police, not firefighters, argued for maintenance of parity. Prior to the growth of public concern about increasing crime, and before the civil disorders of the 1960's, firefighters had been far more successful in pressing wage increases than police officers were. Firefighters were typically far more politically active than police officers; fire associations organized earlier and were much stronger than police alliances. Most importantly, the fire service was regarded as the more physically demanding, hazardous, and "sophisticated" of the two services.

In contrast, the image of police that was left as a legacy of prohibition was one of incompetence and corruption. As a result, only in this generation has the issue of parity most often been cast as firefighters, rather than police, saying "me, too."

A review of the literature reveals a wide range of arguments regarding the need to maintain wage parity. Following are 11 of these arguments. The number might be slightly more or less, depending upon how one separates or combines certain perspectives.

## Arguments for maintaining parity

*1. Relation between parity and agency morale.* It might be asserted that a change in parity would be devastating to the morale of the agency that got the short end of the deal—that such a change would send a clear message to the affected employees that they had become second-class citizens.

From a public administration perspective, however, the issue is not merely hurt feelings; the ultimate concern is the productivity of public employees. In this regard, it is not possible to list a specific set of productivity declines that would result from decreased morale. Productivity in public safety is difficult to measure. Unlike private sector services, a public service is not a profit-making enterprise. In addition, unlike the situation with other public service agencies, such as sanitation or transportation, delivery benchmarks are not easily identified for emergency and public safety services.

Nevertheless, the services that both types of public safety workers provide relate to life-and-death issues, and accordingly, no one wants a police officer or firefighter to be affected—even if only unconsciously—by a perception of him- or herself as a second-class citizen.

*2. Hourly versus weekly pay.* Typically, firefighters work 2,500 to 2,920 hours a year, a workweek of between 48 and 56 hours. (None of these hours are overtime; the Fair Labor

Standards Act exempts firefighters from overtime hours and pay for what it construes to be a standard 48- to 56-hour work week for firefighters.) In contrast, police officers work a standard 40-hour week, 2,080 hours a year. Therefore, parity in annual base wages does not equate to parity on an hourly basis. By that measure, firefighters earn about 75 percent of a police officer's wages.

*3. Danger among public safety workers.* Statistics on deaths and on-the-job injuries that require leave time indicate that,

**Exhibit 1. Police-firefighter pay relationship in 20 largest U.S. cities, police officer and line firefighter base pay, 1984**

City	Minimum base pay	Maximum base pay
New York .....	Parity	Parity
Chicago .....	Parity	Fire greater
Los Angeles .....	Police greater	Fire greater
Philadelphia .....	Parity	Parity
Houston .....	Parity	Fire greater
Detroit .....	Parity	Fire greater
Dallas .....	Parity	Fire greater
San Diego .....	Fire greater	Fire greater
Phoenix .....	Parity	Parity
Baltimore .....	Police greater	Fire greater
San Antonio .....	Fire greater	Fire greater
Indianapolis .....	Fire greater	Fire greater
San Francisco .....	Parity	Fire greater
Memphis .....	Police greater	Fire greater
Washington .....	Parity	Parity
Milwaukee .....	Police greater	Parity
San Jose .....	Police greater	Fire greater
Cleveland .....	Police greater	Fire greater
Columbus .....	Police greater	Police greater
Boston .....	Police greater	Police greater

SOURCE: *Police Labor Monthly*, September 1984.

**Exhibit 2. Police-firefighter pay relationship in 20 largest U.S. cities, first-line supervisors, 1984**

City	Minimum base pay
New York .....	Parity
Chicago .....	Parity
Los Angeles .....	Fire greater
Philadelphia .....	Parity
Houston .....	Parity
Detroit .....	Police greater
Dallas .....	Parity
San Diego .....	Fire greater
Phoenix .....	Fire greater
Baltimore .....	Parity
San Antonio .....	Police greater
Indianapolis .....	Fire greater
San Francisco .....	Parity
Memphis .....	Fire greater
Washington .....	Parity
Milwaukee .....	Police greater
San Jose .....	Fire greater
Cleveland .....	Police greater
Columbus .....	Police greater
Boston .....	Police greater

SOURCE: *Police Labor Monthly*, September 1984.

contrary to the public perception, firefighting is the more dangerous of the two occupations. Therefore, because relative danger is always a consideration in determining wages, firefighters' wages ought to at least be on a par with police officers' wages.

For this article, we reviewed several sources of data on occupational injury and death. Although the data vary considerably, in virtually every instance the occupational death and injury rate for firefighters was substantially higher than for police officers.

According to statistics from the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries,<sup>4</sup> in 1994, the on-the-job death rate for firefighters was 22 per 100,000. By contrast, police officers had an on-the-job fatality rate of 14 per 100,000.<sup>5</sup>

The National Safety Council also collects data on occupational injuries. According to its data, firefighters sustain more injuries in the line of duty than do police officers. The 1989 edition of *Accident Facts* states that firefighters averaged 6.61 lost workdays a year per 100 workers, compared with 2.51 for police.<sup>6</sup> Using lost workdays may be misleading, however, because "light duty" assignments are more common in police departments.

The results of a recent study completed at San Jose State University indicate that firefighting is the fifth most dangerous occupation in the Nation.<sup>7</sup> At 48.8 deaths per 100,000, firefighting is listed as 2 to 3 times more dangerous than policing, with 17.5 deaths per 100,000. Although these rates are lower than those published by the firefighters' association, the gap between policing and firefighting is comparable.

Of course, we are not arguing that firefighters should be compensated at a rate 2 to 3 times that of police officers: hazard is only one consideration in determining wage rates. But it is certainly an important consideration, with even the Armed Forces providing special compensation for those assigned to hazardous duties and areas. Thus, the hazards of firefighting are one of the strongest arguments for parity.

**4. Stress among public safety workers.** According to a recently completed study by the American Heart Association,<sup>8</sup> firefighting ranks first among the 25 most stressful occupations. Policing also is ranked as very stressful, placing sixth on the list.

Studies intended to classify the degree of stress in various occupations frequently rely upon morbidity and mortality data from stress-related diseases to provide a proxy measure of the degree of psychological stress. One analyst cites data from the Public Health Service indicating that cardiovascular dis-

**Table 2. Comparison of firefighter and police officer base salary in 10 largest U.S. cities, 1990**

City	Salary expiration date	Police and firefighter minimum	Police and firefighter maximum	Firefighter as percent of police
Chicago .....	June 30, 1990	\$25,944/\$25,944	\$33,750/\$33,750	100.0
Dallas .....	June 30, 1990	25,093/25,093	32,025/32,025	100.0
Detroit .....	June 30, 1990	24,293/24,293	32,089/32,089	100.0
Houston .....	June 30, 1995	20,756/20,756	28,660/28,660	100.0
Los Angeles .....	June 30, 1990	31,570/28,874	43,054/42,198	98.0
New York .....	June 30, 1990	25,977/25,977	38,914/38,914	100.0
Philadelphia .....	June 30, 1990	26,984/26,984	30,678/30,678	100.0
Phoenix .....	June 30, 1990	24,877/24,768	36,858/35,064	95.0
San Antonio .....	June 30, 1991	24,048/26,184	30,600/29,616	109/97
San Diego .....	June 30, 1989	25,165/21,945	38,825/35,579	92.0

<sup>1</sup> In San Antonio, the maximum salary of firefighters equals 97 percent of that of police officers, the minimum 109 percent.

ease rates for firefighters exceed the rates for police officers.<sup>9</sup>

**5. Opportunities to supplement salary with overtime pay.** Most police officers routinely receive overtime, while firefighters seldom do. Several elements of police work contribute to this. First, it is not unusual that, at the end of an 8-hour shift, making an arrest requires an officer to remain on duty to book the offender. Second, unlike firefighters, who are usually relieved at the station, police officers must change shift "in the field." Police units, do, of course, return to the substation at the end of their shift. However, in the process it is not unusual for them to have to respond to a call for service or a traffic incident, which frequently leads to overtime. Third, police officers must testify in court, generating many automatic overtime payments. Indeed, as a matter of policy, most police departments provide a minimum number of hours for off-duty court appearances, which contribute to the overtime supplement. On the other hand, budgetary constraints in some localities have led to work being done "off the clock."

**6. Ability to supplement salary with outside employment.** Since 1985, the salaries of some public safety personnel have remained virtually frozen. This forced a high proportion of both firefighters and police officers to hold part-time outside employment. Firefighters argue that police officers in most cities are in a far better position than they are to supplement their salaries with outside employment.

It might be held that police officers have an advantage over firefighters because of two differences in their respective occupations. First, police work schedules are generally flexible enough to permit outside employment. A 40-hour workweek, 8 hours a day for 5 days, provides police officers with off-duty hours that are more conducive to routine outside employment. By contrast, because few part-time jobs are available for only 2 or 3 days a week, firefighters' work schedules preclude them from any part-time employment that requires

**Exhibit 3. Parity between police officer and firefighter salaries, by size of selected cities, 1950-90**

City	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
<b>More than 1 million</b>					
Chicago, IL .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	—
Dallas, TX .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity
San Diego, CA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Fire greater	Police greater
<b>500,000 to 999,999</b>					
Baltimore, MD .....	—	Parity	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Cleveland, OH .....	Parity	Parity	—	—	Parity
Columbus, OH .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
Denver, CO .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
Honolulu, HI .....	—	—	Police greater	Police greater	Fire greater
Indianapolis, IN .....	Police greater	Parity	Police greater	—	—
Jacksonville, FL .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Police greater
Memphis, TN .....	Fire greater	—	—	—	Police greater
Phoenix, AZ .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Parity	Police greater
San Antonio, TX .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	—	Police greater
San Francisco, CA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
San Jose, CA .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Police greater	Parity
<b>250,000 to 499,999</b>					
Atlanta, GA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Parity
Austin, TX .....	Parity	—	Police greater	—	Fire greater
Baton Rouge, LA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	—
Buffalo, NY .....	Parity	Parity	—	Parity	Parity
Charlotte, NC .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Colorado Springs, CO .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
Fort Worth, TX .....	Parity	Parity	Fire greater	Parity	—
Long Beach, CA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity
Minneapolis, MN .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	—	—
Wichita, KS .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Parity	Police greater
St. Louis, MO .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	—	—
<b>100,000 to 249,999</b>					
Abilene, TX .....	Parity	Fire greater	Police greater	Parity	Police greater
Akron, OH .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	—	Parity
Anaheim, CA .....	—	Parity	Police greater	—	Police greater
Anchorage, AK .....	—	—	Police greater	Fire greater	Police greater
Arlington, VA .....	—	—	Parity	—	—
Cedar Rapids, IA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	—	Police greater
Dayton, OH .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	—
Flint, MI .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	—	Police greater
Garland, TX .....	—	—	Police greater	Fire greater	Police greater
Independence, MO .....	—	Parity	Police greater	—	Parity
<b>50,000 to 99,999</b>					
La Mesa, CA .....	—	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
Albany, GA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Police greater
Bryan, TX .....	—	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Bethlehem, PA .....	Parity	Parity	—	Police greater	Police greater
Billings, MT .....	—	Parity	—	Police greater	Police greater
Fayetteville, NC .....	Parity	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Lawton, OK .....	—	—	Fire greater	Parity	Parity
Portland, ME .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	—	Parity
Pawtucket, RI .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Fire greater
Wyoming, MI .....	—	—	Parity	Police greater	—
Lafayette, LA .....	—	Fire greater	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
<b>25,000 to 49,999</b>					
Annapolis, MD .....	—	—	Fire greater	Police greater	Police greater
Ashland, KY .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Fire greater	Parity
Beaverton, OR .....	—	—	—	Police greater	Police greater
Bowling Green, KY .....	—	—	Fire greater	—	Parity

**Exhibit 3. Continued—Parity between police officer and firefighter salaries, by size of selected cities, 1950–90**

City	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Florence, SC .....	Police greater	Parity	Police greater	Parity	—
Hackensack, NJ .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
Minot, ND .....	Fire greater	Fire greater	Parity	Parity	Parity
Montclair, CA .....	—	—	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Panama City, FL .....	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater	—	—
Quincy, IL .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity
Rome, GA .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity
<b>10,000 to 24,999</b>					
Bristol, VA .....	—	Parity	Fire greater	—	Parity
Brunswick, GA .....	Parity	Police greater	Police greater	—	Police greater
Cadillac, MI .....	—	Parity	Parity	Fire greater	Fire greater
Chickasha, OK .....	Parity	—	Parity	Fire greater	Parity
Cocoa Beach, FL .....	—	—	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Emporia, KS .....	Parity	Parity	Police greater	Police greater	Police greater
Franklin, IN .....	—	—	Parity	Parity	Parity
Gainesville, TX .....	—	Parity	Parity	—	Parity
Greenwood, SC .....	—	Parity	Parity	Parity	Police greater
Laramie, WY .....	Parity	Parity	Parity	—	Police greater
Richmond Heights, MO .....	—	Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity

NOTE: Dash indicates information is not reported.

their presence on any given day of the week.

Of even greater importance than the work schedule, however, is a natural job-related form of outside employment for police officers: security service. Nearly all police officers who hold outside employment work in this field. Indeed, several police officers have organized their own firms and coordinate the hiring of other officers for security posts. In some cities, such as Boston and Louisville, the police department itself functions as a placement office for privately funded security positions. Wage rates for police officers in security service are extremely competitive; firefighters have virtually no comparable type of outside employment.

In response to the preceding argument, police officers point out that firefighters often also hold second jobs, particularly in construction trades. Turning the scheduling issue on its head, the police say that the “batched” working hours of firefighters create an ideal opportunity for their outside employment.

**7. After-retirement employment opportunities.** This argument mirrors the preceding one: just as security service affords police officers greater opportunities for part-time employment than firefighters get while they serve the city, so, too, does it offer them a natural postretirement employment that is less available to firefighters. With the exception of a few positions in the petrochemical industry, there are virtually no jobs in the private sector to which the skills used in firefighting are directly transferable.

**8. Recruitment and retention of personnel.** It has been argued that if either service were to receive incrementally more

in base wages than the other, there would be a deleterious effect upon the latter in its ability to recruit and retain personnel. Certainly, it is known that at various times one or the other service has more trouble recruiting employees, and although it is impossible to say for sure, a break with parity could simply transfer the recruitment problem from the one to the other.

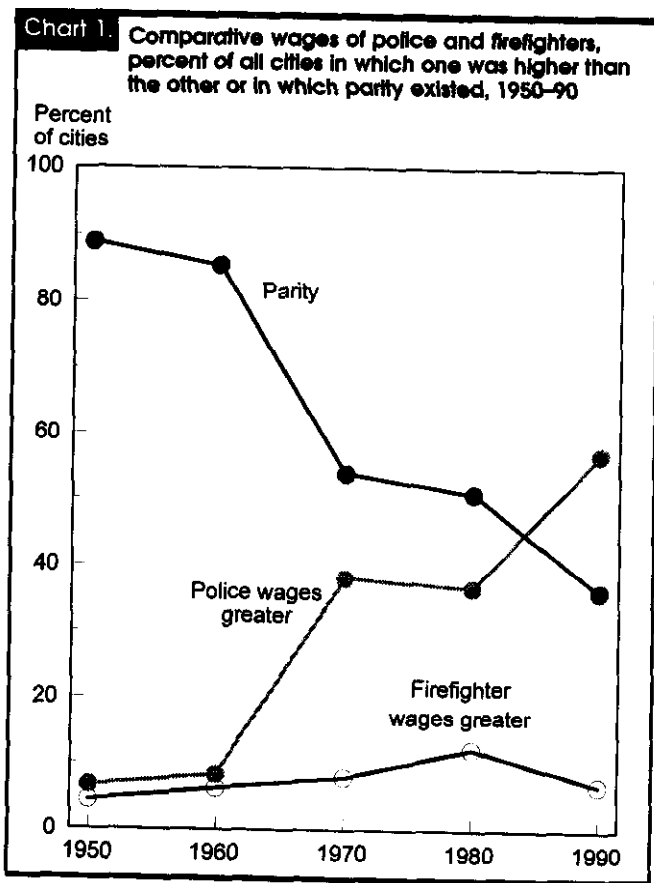
Moreover, maintaining parity not only avoids recruitment and retention problems, but actively contributes to the quality of personnel in both services. Parity makes it more likely that applicants who are interested in police work seek employment with the police department, while those whose talents are better suited to firefighting seek employment in that field. In the absence of parity, applicants would tend more to seek work with the department that received the higher wages, regardless of their predilections or talents.

**9. Parity in earnings as a reflection of parity in technical and human relation skills.** Advocates of parity argue that, although the particular skills required for firefighting are certainly different from those required for police work, in many respects they are comparable. Elements of both jobs involve human relation skills, as well as technical skills such as providing emergency medical services. This rough comparability of skills should be mirrored in wages, say proponents of parity.

**10. Downtime.** It is often argued that a high proportion of a firefighter’s time is spent unproductively, at the fire station. Proponents of parity contend, however, that this so-called downtime need not be unproductive. In fact, maintenance of

vehicles and equipment, as well as training, occupies a high proportion of these hours at the station. Moreover, studies in the law enforcement field indicate that, on average, only about 50 percent of police patrol time is spent on the direct delivery of service.<sup>10</sup> Thus, like firefighters, police officers have their share of downtime, but, unlike firefighters, theirs does not have the appearance of idleness.

*11. Supervision.* Opponents of parity sometimes argue that policing involves more responsibility than firefighting does because police officers work alone, without direct supervision, while firefighters put out a fire only in the presence of supervisors. Firefighters counter that this argument ignores two factors. First, police officers are in constant radio contact with supervisors and thus in fact seek guidance when it is needed. Second, although it is true that there is direct supervision at a fire, in the confusion and urgency of fighting the blaze, firefighters are frequently out of sight and out of earshot of supervisory personnel. Indeed, while inside a burning building and with self-contained breathing apparatus, a firefighter would find it difficult to check with the district chief regarding his or her next move. Hence, the supervisory aspects of fighting a fire are not significantly different from those relating to active police work.



## Conclusions

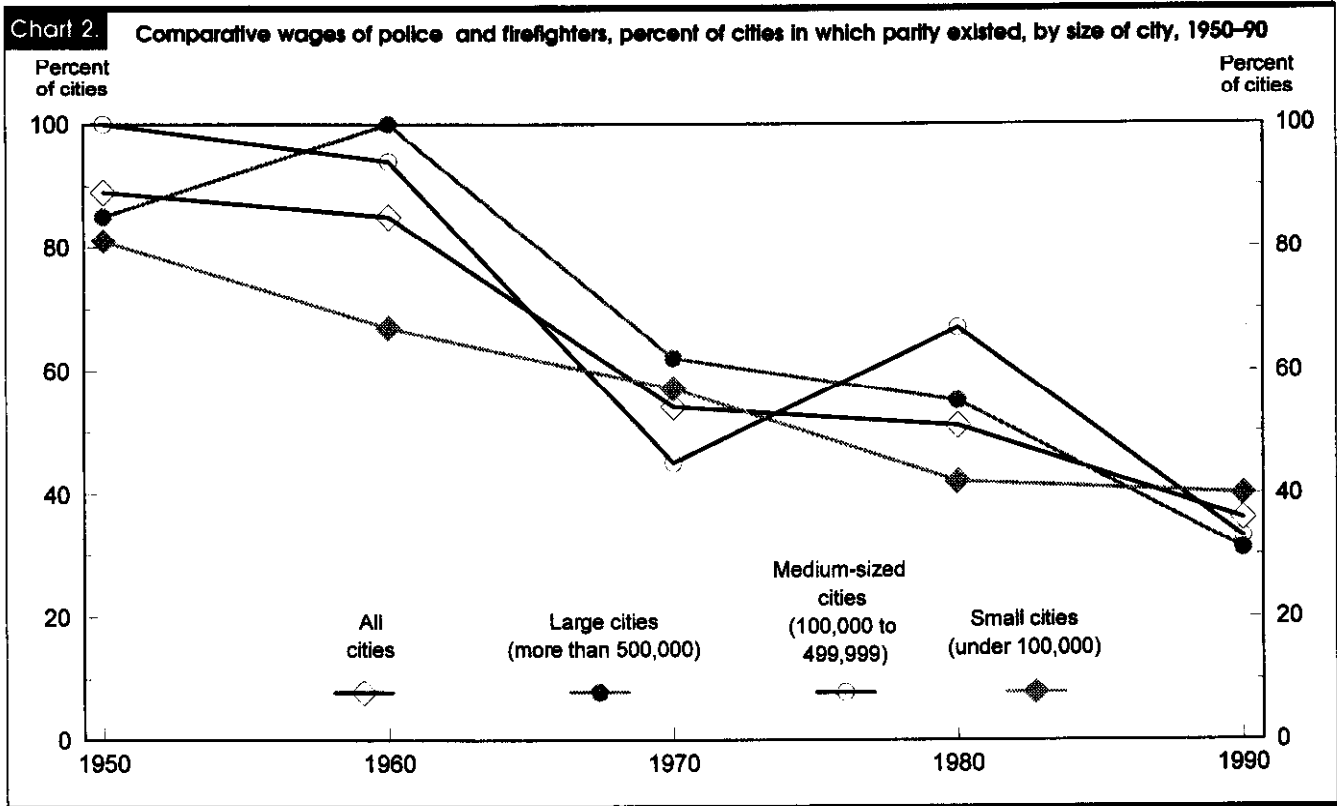
Wage parity between police officers and firefighters has eroded steadily since 1950. Despite the arguments presented in the previous section, a disparity has arisen in favor of police salaries. Several explanations can be found for this trend. First, the threat of fire has likely diminished over the past several decades, as technology, in the form of new flame-retardant materials and improved fire-resistant building and construction, has advanced. At the same time, the fear of crime has at least remained steady, or even increased. As a result, the public has become increasingly willing to pay more for police protection than for fire protection.

Second, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice made a substantial contribution to the professionalization of the police in the late 1960's. Recognizing the need for college-level instruction for police officers, the Commission was the major impetus behind a Government commitment to spend millions of dollars on such education. The resulting professionalization of the police force may be one of the major reasons that more jurisdictions paid police officers considerably higher salaries in 1970 than they received in earlier years.

Third, the late 1970's brought this first group of college-trained police officers into leadership positions in police agencies throughout the country. As a result, government agencies began working with police personnel who were able to articulate clearly the professional nature of policing and the need for higher salaries for recruitment and retention. Concurrently, rank-and-file police union members also became more professionally trained. Public sector collective bargaining and arbitration laws passed in the 1960's and 1970's have allowed those in union leadership positions to negotiate more effectively the case for increased salaries based on professionalism.

Fourth, the nationwide growth in the number of police education programs has made law enforcement a legitimate professional career. Not only have those who are interested in a career in policing been taking courses in law enforcement, but also, many others, including public administration majors, have enrolled in these courses, using them as electives or even choosing them as minor fields of study. As a consequence, an increasing number of public administrators, as well as the public in general, recognize law enforcement as a career that requires a college degree and, in turn, a commensurate salary. By contrast, firefighting, which does not require a college education, is seen more as a craft that does not merit the same salary scale as police work does.

The demise of parity is an issue that ought to be neither lauded nor decried. Parity is a function of what a society believes the monetary worth of the two agencies should be. In some municipalities, sentiment dictates that public safety overall should be paid one wage rate. In other jurisdic-



tions, the police have been successful in achieving public support for higher wages. In a lesser number of jurisdictions, firefighters receive the higher salary. It may be that the latter jurisdictions have particular fire security needs that can be met only by paying firefighters more. However, what there is no doubt about is that parity has eroded enormously over the past 50 years, and it will likely not be soon restored. □

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> D. Lewin, "Wage Parity and the Supply of Police and Firemen," *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector*, September 1978, pp. 279-85.  
<sup>2</sup> Justex Systems, "Fire and Police Wage Parity: A Report for the Houston Professional Firefighters Association," Huntsville, TX, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Lewin, "Wage Parity."  
<sup>4</sup> Supplementary table to news release USDL 95-288 (Department of Labor, Aug. 3, 1995).  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Accident Facts* (Chicago, National Safety Council, 1990).  
<sup>7</sup> J. Paul Leigh, "Estimates of Job-related Deaths," *Journal of Occupational Medicine*, June 1987, pp. 510-19.  
<sup>8</sup> Cited in Oklahoma State University, *International Fire Service Training Association Newsletter*, Winter 1989.  
<sup>9</sup> W. C. Terry, III, "Police Stress: The Empirical Evidence," in C. B. Klockars, ed., *Thinking about Police* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 439-53.  
<sup>10</sup> G. L. Kelling, T. Pate, D. Dickman, and C. E. Brown, *The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment: A Technical Report* (Washington, DC, The Police Foundation, 1974).