

**STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN DALE E. KILDEE**  
**Hearing on "*Ensuring Collective Bargaining Rights for First Responders: H.R. 980, The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007,*"**  
**June 5, 2007**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**I would like to commend you for holding this hearing today on H.R. 980, the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act, which would enable public safety employees to discuss work conditions with their employers. This legislation would extend to firefighters, police officers, EMTs and other public safety officers the basic right to discuss workplace issues with their employers.**

**I sponsored this legislation with my friend from Tennessee, Mr. Duncan, because I feel that public safety officers, who risk their lives to protect us, deserve a say in decisions that affect their lives and their livelihood.**

**I would also like to thank the groups that we have worked with on this legislation, including the International Association of Fire Fighters, the Fraternal Order of Police, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the National Association of Police Organizations.**

**The absence of the right to collectively bargain denies these public servants the opportunity to influence decisions that affect their work and their families. Firefighters and police officers take seriously their oath to protect the public, and as a result they do not engage in work slowdowns or stoppages.**

**Our firefighters and police officers risk their lives to keep us safe. Yet there are some states in this country that deny them the basic right to discuss workplace issues with their employers – a right many Americans have. We should not forget that firefighters and police men and women risk their lives everyday to protect the public. At the very least, they should be allowed to negotiate for wages, hours, and safe working conditions.**

**When I was in the state legislature in Michigan, I helped pass legislation that grants all public employees the right to collectively bargain. In Michigan, this has led to a working environment that effectively protects the public and that both employers and employees can be proud of. Studies have actually found that cooperation between public safety employers and employees reduces fatalities, improves public safety services, and saves the taxpayers money.**

**While I feel that Michigan is an excellent example of how employer and employee cooperation can benefit everyone, I do not want to impose the same structure on all states. I recognize that states may have different approaches that would be more effective for that state.**

**H.R. 980 would merely create a minimum standard that states have the flexibility to implement, regulate and enforce as they see fit. Many states, such as Michigan, have laws in place that go well beyond H.R. 980, and these states would not be affected by this legislation.**

**Additionally, this legislation does not allow strikes or lockouts and it preserves management rights. Firefighters and police officers are very serious about their commitment to public safety. They deserve the basic right to sit down with their employers and discuss their work conditions. The reasonableness of this legislation is demonstrated by the wide bipartisan support it has from its 235 cosponsors. I urge my colleagues to join me in moving this legislation through the House. I yield back the balance of my time.**