

Statement of the Hon. George Miller
Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor
Markup on H.R. 980, “The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation
Act of 2007”
June 20, 2007

Good morning. Welcome to the Full Committee mark-up of H.R. 980, *The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007*.

Before we begin consideration of this legislation, I want to take a moment to note the terrible tragedy that took place in Charleston, South Carolina this week. Nine brave firefighters gave their own lives to save the lives of others. We owe them and their families our deepest gratitude, and we grieve their loss.

I want to thank my friend and colleague, Congressman Dale Kildee, as well as Congressman John Duncan, the sponsors of H.R. 980, for their tireless work and advocacy on this legislation.

Congressman Kildee first introduced the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act over ten years ago. I am hopeful that today we will vote H.R. 980 out of Committee, and in the near future the *Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act* will be passed by the House of Representatives.

Public safety officers, including firefighters, police officers, corrections officers, and emergency medical technicians risk

their lives each and everyday to protect our lives and this country.

Two hundred and fifty-six of my Democratic and Republican colleagues have honored these dedicated men and women by co-sponsoring H.R. 980.

The wide range of support that this legislation has garnered is rare. It demonstrates how committed we are to protecting the rights and livelihoods of our first responders.

Historically, states and cities and towns have managed their own labor relations.

Unfortunately, approximately twenty states do not fully protect the collective bargaining rights of public safety employees, and two states – Virginia and North Carolina – prohibit public safety employees from collectively bargaining.

That is why H.R. 980 is necessary.

H.R. 980 would respect those states that already provide collective bargaining rights to public safety employees. It would extend those rights to workers in all states.

The bill would provide basic labor protections for state and local public safety workers, including:

- The right to join a union;

- The right to have their union recognized by their employer;
- The right to bargain collectively over hours, wages and terms and conditions of employment;
- A mediation or arbitration process for resolving an impasse in negotiations;
- Enforcement through courts.

Given the demands and pressures of their jobs, public safety employees ought to have a strong voice at work. If they do, it will benefit many aspects of their work.

For starters, public safety workers would have a say on critical issues like safety on the job and on whether public services are being provided in the most efficient and effective manner.

Communication and cooperation between rank-and-file public safety employees and management would improve, ensuring more cohesive and coordinated operations.

With a stronger voice at work, public safety professionals would be able to bargain for better pay and working conditions. This would reduce turnover and increase workers' experience and skill levels.

The brave men and women who risk their lives each day and serve as our first line of defense against medical emergencies,

criminals, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks deserve the right to bargain with their employers.

The right to join unions and bargain collectively is a fundamental, internationally-recognized human right.

We have a duty to guarantee this basic right to all of our first responders. I look forward to the passage of H.R. 980.

Thank you.