

NAPO's Seminars, Legislative Wins, and Urgent Reminders: Catch Up on Pension & Benefits, Project Safe Childhood Act, Medicare Buy-In Bill, House Updates, Fentanyl Sales Combat, and PSOB Benefit Deadlines!

November 3, 2023

NAPO's 35th Annual Police, Fire, EMS and Municipal Employee Pension & Benefits Seminar

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Register today and join us January 28 – 30, 2024 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas for NAPO's 35th Annual Police, Fire, EMS & Municipal Employee Pension & Benefits Seminar. Our goal for the Pension & Benefits Seminar is to educate pension and union representatives along with their providers on the latest issues surrounding the pension and benefits industry. Working in close collaboration with our distinguished advisory board, we have put together a program relevant that will focus on the challenges and causes for concern in today's pension and benefits environment.

Greatly increased costs of living appear permanent, and the threats of stagflation and a general recession are rearing their heads. Politically, both parties are already focused on and positioning themselves

regarding the upcoming general election. Expanded use of artificial intelligence, the retreat from socially conscious investing, the mounting national debt and its impact on the U.S. credit rating, expanded liability for fiduciaries, and expansion of IRS taxation and reporting powers are just some of the issues being debated. Meanwhile, benefits themselves are being increasingly viewed as a key component of recruitment and retention. We will examine these areas and more as we evaluate the effect of these trends on public employment benefits and security, and the overall economic situation for the near- and mid-term.

Take an active role in improving the future of your fund by registering today. You will find information regarding registration, hotel reservations and the full agenda on NAPO's website: www.NAPO.org/PB24

If you have any questions or need additional information about the Seminar, contact NAPO's Director of Events, Elizabeth Loranger at 800-322-6276 or eloranger@www.napo.org.

NAPO Victory! Senate Passes Project Safe Childhood Act

In a victory for NAPO, the Senate passed the Project Safe Childhood Act (S. 1170) by voice vote on October 24. Project Safe Childhood is a national initiative to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Originally launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice and led by the U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood pulls together federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children through the internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims.

The Project Safe Childhood Act would reauthorize and update this important program to modernize how online child exploitation crimes are investigated and prosecuted and it would make improvements to how federal prosecutors and federal, state, and local law enforcement work

together and use new technology to go after predators. This bill would reauthorize the program for five years at \$62 million per year to fund:

Case coordination of child sexual exploitation crimes to quickly identify and rescue child victims and arrest offenders;

Training and technical assistance for law enforcement;

Public awareness campaigns regarding threats posed to children online; and

The hiring of additional federal prosecutors to work on online child exploitation cases.

NAPO thanks Senators John Cornyn (R-TX), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Richard Blumenthal (D-CN) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) for their steadfast leadership on this issue. We are now focusing our efforts to get the Project Safe Childhood Act through the House and to the President's desk to be signed into law.

NAPO Endorsed First Responder Medicare Buy-In Bill Reintroduced

The NAPO supported Expanding Health Care Options for First Responders Act (S. 3113), sponsored by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), was reintroduced on October 24. This legislation would allow retired public safety officers ages 50 to 64 to buy-in to Medicare.

Law enforcement officers often retire earlier than other occupations because of the physical demands and unique hazards of the job, and many are faced with mandatory retirement upon reaching a certain age. Across the country, retiring officers are losing their employer-provided health insurance and, as they are years away from being Medicare-eligible, are forced to spend their retirement money on health insurance premiums.

This legislation is important as it would give law enforcement retirees another option to purchase affordable health insurance coverage. It would ensure they continue to have access to reasonable, comprehensive health insurance in retirement until they reach age 65 regardless of whether their state pension plan provides insurance coverage. The legislation would only allow the retired officers to buy-in to Medicare early; family members and dependents would not be eligible for this coverage.

NAPO believes that the Expanding Health Care Options for First Responders Act would help preserve the retirement security and the health of those public servants who selflessly serve and protect our communities. Preserving the retirement security of all our members is a top priority for us. There has been some concern that those employers whose pension plans provide health care coverage to retirees could try to force retirees into Medicare early rather than provide health coverage. NAPO continues to monitor this concern and will work to address it if the prospect of this legislation being enacted negatively impacts our members' ability to negotiate health care for their retirees.

House Elects New Speaker, Takes on FY 24 Appropriations
After weeks without a Speaker and a halt in all legislative work, Republicans elected Congressman Mike Johnson (R-LA) to be the next Speaker on October 24. Speaker Johnson has been a long-time member of the House Judiciary Committee, voted in favor of many of NAPO's legislative priority bills, and is cosponsoring several NAPO-endorsed legislation this Congress including the Social Security Fairness Act, the Thin Blue Line Act, and the LEOSA Reform Act.

With Speaker Johnson in place, the House immediately got to work on an aggressive schedule of passing the remaining Fiscal 2024 appropriations bills by November 17, when the current continuing

resolution (CR) funding the federal government runs out. The House passed the Energy-Water on a party-line vote on October 26 and came back on November 1 to pass the Legislative Branch appropriations measure with a nearly all Republican vote. Next up is the Interior appropriations measure.

Speaker Johnson directed the Appropriations Committee to discharge the Commerce-Justice-Science and the Labor-Health and Human Services spending measures even though neither bill was able to gain Committee approval due to intraparty disagreements over several controversial measures. The House is scheduled to take up these bills, in addition to the Transportation – Housing and Urban Development, the Financial Services and the Agriculture appropriations bills, the weeks of November 6 and 13. All these bills are expected to pass along near party-line votes, so there will be a need for the House and Senate to conference over each appropriations bill to work out their differences.

Speaker Johnson acknowledged that another continuing resolution will be necessary, and he has the backing of the Republican conference on this, unlike former-Speaker McCarthy, who was booted for passing the bipartisan CR that runs through November 17. House Republicans would like a CR to run through mid-January at the earliest, while House Democrats and the Senate want to consider a shorter CR that runs through December 15. Unlike the current CR, Speaker Johnson and the Republicans will try to get some concessions from Democrats included, such as border security funding and possibly funding cuts, setting up a fight between the House, Senate, and White House.

NAPO continues to be involved in the appropriations process and is working to ensure that state and local law enforcement assistance grant programs are sufficiently funded in FY 24. We look forward to working with Speaker Johnson to ensure our nation's law enforcement has the

support and resources needed to serve and protect our communities efficiently and effectively.

NAPO Backs Bill to Combat Social Media Fentanyl Sales to Youth

NAPO pledged its support for the Combatting Fentanyl Poisonings Act (H.R. 6144), introduced by Congressman Mike Garcia (R-CA), which would establish two grant programs under the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) to combat fentanyl by providing critical resources to state and local law enforcement agencies to go after dealers that target kids and to non-profit organizations to educate youth about the dangers of fentanyl and counterfeit drugs.

The spread of fentanyl in our communities is devastating. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, more than 106,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2021 and opioids were involved in over 70,601 of those deaths, a significant increase in opioid-related overdose deaths over previous years. Many of these deaths were from using synthetic analogues of fentanyl. Fentanyl is being mixed with already deadly illicit drugs, hidden in counterfeit drugs, and being peddled at alarmingly high rates to our youth through social media.

The Combatting Fentanyl Poisonings Act focuses on the deadly impact this poison has on our nation's youth by providing resources to law enforcement, schools, families, and victims to combat and deter sales of fentanyl on social media and to educate communities on the dangers of this illicit drug. With 77 percent of teen overdose deaths in 2021 linked to fentanyl, the time to act to protect our children is now. NAPO continues to fight for resources to attack and prevent the spread of fentanyl in our communities and we thank Congressman Garcia for his advocacy and leadership on this issue.

IMPORTANT REMINDER!

Deadline for 9/11 Responders to Apply for PSOB Benefits Under PAFRA

is November 17, 2023

If you answered the call on 9/11 or in the days, weeks, or months after and you became disabled because of your exposure at Ground Zero or you are a family member of a 9/11 responder who died of their injuries from 9/11, you may be entitled to federal disability or death benefits through the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program.

On November 18, 2021, NAPO secured a significant victory with the enactment of the Protecting America's First Responders Act (PAFRA). This Act eased the requirements to qualify for federal disability benefits under PSOB Program. It also established a two-year window from enactment specifically for 9/11 responders to file a disability claim for an injury sustained in the line of duty as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, assuming no claim had already been filed or the claim had been denied on the fact that the injury did not meet the old disability requirements. It also allows families of 9/11 responders catastrophically injured because of the attacks, but who died of those injuries prior to being able to apply for benefits, to apply for death benefits within the two-year window.

The two-year window is important because under PSOB statute, a claim has to be filed within 3 years of the injury or death and PSOB considers September 11, 2001 the date of injury for 9/11 responders. The two-year window for 9/11 responders, who became catastrophically disabled or died of their injuries prior to 2021, to submit a claim ends November 17, 2023. To meet the deadline, an officer or their family only need to start a claim application on the PSOB website (PSOB.gov) – the application does not need to be completed by November 17.

It is important to note that this window is only for those officers who became catastrophically disabled or died due to their injuries prior to the enactment of PAFRA. A 9/11 responder who becomes disabled or dies

due to a 9/11-related illness after 2021 is eligible for PSOB death or disability benefits through the normal PSOB process, as long as the application is started within 3 years of the death or date of disability diagnosis.

PAFRA eased the strict requirements for disabled officers to qualify for PSOB disability benefits, ensuring that officers who are catastrophically injured in the line of duty, but can perform some level of meaningful work, would still qualify for the much-needed benefit. Further, officers who become quadriplegic, paraplegic, or blind due to the line of duty injury automatically qualify for the PSOB disability benefit.

If you have any questions on the PSOB Program or filing a claim under PAFRA, please contact NAPO's Director of Governmental Affairs, Andy Edmiston, at aedmiston@www.napo.org or (703) 549-0775 or you can contact the PSOB Customer Resource Center at 1-888-744-6513.