ARLINGTON PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS AND PARAMEDICS ASSN.

IAFF Local 2800
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MEDIA ADVISORY
For Immediate Release

"What kind of man uses the COVID pandemic to take away first responder benefits?"

Arlington's Firefighter Union Pushes Back Against County Manager who used the COVID Emergency Declaration to Remove Long Standing Employee Benefits

3/15/2022 - After over a year of internal negotiations involving the Arlington County Manager, County Board and Civil Service Commission going nowhere, IAFF Local 2800, the union representing more than 300 firefighters, fire marshals and paramedics in Arlington County, finally went public regarding a specific concern with the County's recent changes to employee benefits.

The change, the union says, is abhorrent.

Using the emergency powers granted to him by the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, County Manager Schwartz abolished the long standing Weather Emergency pay benefits that County employees have received for years.

"**We think that's absurd**." Said a post by the union's official Facebook page "It's ***morally wrong*** to use the pandemic, the one that WE ARE ON THE FRONT LINE RESPONDING TO , as the reason to take benefits away from us."

"First responders can't work remotely-" the post continued "If a citizen is having trouble breathing due to COVID, and it's snowing - we still show up - **we can't do our job over zoom."**

"What kind of man uses the COVID pandemic to take away benefits from first responders?" said one member of the public in the comment section of the post.

The changes made by the Manager, the union claims, is another example of the County, one of the wealthiest places in the world, continuing to balance their budget on the backs of frontline workers and first responders.

"When this first happened, we filed a grievance and attempted to get this fixed through the Civil Service Commission" said a member of the union "however, the Commission ruled that, though morally wrong, the County Manager could take away long standing benefits from employees using the Covid Emergency Declaration from March of 2020."

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However, in their ruling from Nov, 2021, the Commission also gave the County three recommendations to prevent abuses of power like this from happening again. As of now, none of those recommendations have been enacted.

The union says they have sent a letter to the County Board in an attempt to get this addressed, but have not received any commitments from board members as of yet.

“What’s absurd to us, is - we’ve been the ones responding to COVID-19 on the ground. We’ve been the ones exposing ourselves and our families to the virus in order to protect the community we serve. But we haven’t received hazard pay for the pandemic since June of 2020. - Not only has the pandemic lasted much longer than that, but now, the County Manager is using the powers granted to him, powers given to him in order to help protect our citizens from the pandemic, to take away benefits from the people who are the ones actually fighting the pandemic on the ground.”

“And when we contacted the County Manager about this, he explicitly stated ‘I don’t want to talk about this until bargaining negotiations.’ shutting down the conversation entirely - I’m sorry, but the benefits and livelihood of first responders is not a negotiating chip at any time, yet alone during unprecedented times like these” a member of the union went on to say.

The actions by the County Manager come at a time where the union will begin to play an increasingly larger role in decisions being made due to Collective Bargaining. Local 2800 won their election for representation at the bargaining table with an astounding 98.4% of the vote.

“After a certain point, you get tired being treated like a number on a spreadsheet - we’re people, people with families who love serving the Arlington community - it’s a shame that the County Manager would rather play games than act in good faith”

For more information, please contact:
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To see the letter from the Civil Service Commission to the union and the County, click here
To see the letter from the union to the County Board, click here
To see the original social media post, click here