

Sen. Wirch: Announces bill restoring bargaining over health care for public safety workers

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Kenosha – Sen. Bob Wirch (D-Somers) has co-authored legislation with Sen. Van Wanggaard (R-Racine) that would restore the right of public safety to employees to bargain over their health care coverage. The law known as “Act 10” that was enacted in 2011 under former Governor Scott Walker stripped collective bargaining rights from public employees. While public safety employees were exempt from many of the limitations, they are not allowed to negotiate over health care, as reinforced by a recent Wisconsin Employment Relations Council (WERC) ruling in a case involving Racine fire fighters.

“These men and women risk their lives every time they go to work. The fact that they currently don’t have a say in the design of their health care plan – or even IF they have a health care plan – is shameful. Many of our communities are facing shortages in the ranks of police and fire; this prohibition certainly isn’t helping. I’m excited that we’ve got bipartisan agreement that his needs to change,” Wirch said.

Both Racine fire fighters and Racine police officers have been involved in litigation pertaining to bargaining over health care coverage. Last year, the WERC ruled against the Racine fire fighters, finding that bargaining over health care, with one exception regarding employee contributions to Flexible Spending Accounts, is prohibited by Act 10. Act 10 was the subject of widespread protests at the State Capitol lasting for weeks and involving hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites.

“Twelve years later, we are still dealing with the consequences of Act 10. This bill will right one of the wrongs that was done through that destructive and divisive law,” stated Wirch.

The bill is being released today and will be circulated for co-sponsors.