

STATE OF COLORADO

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John W. Hickenlooper
Governor

June 5, 2014

The Honorable Colorado Senate
Sixty-Ninth General Assembly
State Capitol Building
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Colleagues:

Today, I signed Senate Bill 14-172, "The Firefighter Heart Circulatory Malfunction Benefits Act". This legislation creates the Firefighter Benefits Cash Fund for the direct costs of maintaining accident insurance related to heart and circulatory malfunctions while a firefighter is on duty. This bill passed with strong bipartisan support.

There is no question that firefighters face staggering risks to their lives when on the job. Studies have shown that firefighters are at greater risk of being injured or killed while on the job. A 2007 study by *The New England Journal of Medicine* using a decade of data noted that heart disease causes 45 percent of deaths among U.S. firefighters while they are on-duty and that the risk of a heart attack while fighting a fire increases by 12 to 136 times. This bill seeks to provide support for firefighters that experience heart-related malfunctions while on duty by encouraging their employers to provide insurance coverage.

We have seen how firefighters face adversity regardless of jurisdictional boundaries as they battled wildfires across our state in recent years. It was largely because of the unique risks faced by firefighters and our recognition that their welfare is a matter of mixed state-local concern, that I signed Senate Bill 13-025, "the Colorado Firefighter Safety Act" during the 2013 legislative session.

It is important to note that the General Assembly created a new cash fund dependent on annual appropriations for this program. We have worked hard with the Joint Budget Committee to minimize pressures on the General Fund and would encourage the General Assembly to consider other means of funding this program over time.

Sincerely,

John W. Hickenlooper
Governor