



# INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®

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## **Public Comment**

The Preparedness and Education Committee has made several recommendations to which the IAFF would like to provide comment on.

The IAFF would like to reinforce our position for the need to maintain a certificate entry pathway into the workforce as a paramedic. As a national stakeholder that represents the worker, we feel it is a necessity to maintain a blue-collar pathway into the workforce. To limit our workforce to just one subset of the population would be a complete disservice to our industry. The impact of a degree requirement will limit a community's ability to diversify its workforce to be more representative of the community they serve by limiting access to education and creating an unnecessary financial burden on the worker. The IAFF supports the current option of either the certificate pathway or associate degree pathway but will resist any mandatory degree only option pathway.

Recommendation 1: Promoting an implementation date of 2025 for an associate and baccalaureate degree is over ambitious and unrealistic. Moving to a required degree program will be a major undertaking and requires the necessary resources and impact studies to be performed before even recommending a go live date. Until such activities have been performed and actual researched data presented to fully support such an endeavor, there should be no recommended implementation date.

Recommendation 2: Another extremely ambitious date to set for the a very important objective. The importance of assuring affordability and access must not be understated or underestimated by any means. There should be a definitive study done to assess if there is a current shortage of paramedics because it is the understanding of the IAFF that one of the perceived ways to raise wages is to further reduce the overall number of paramedics. Will it even be financially beneficial for enough universities to develop curriculum and offer these courses for such a small population of students? Also, the Preparedness and Education committee has identified affordability as one of the barriers and is trying to put unrealistic guarantees in place such as; loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, financial aid, and scholarships.

Recommendation 3: This should be recommendation one and the only recommendation thus far from this committee. We need to stop putting the cart before the horse. The industry is working toward accrediting the AEMT program and this would have a significant enough impact on our departments, agencies, and our educators. This very important study needs to identify issues,

obstacles, pros, cons, successes, and failures. It should also identify the ways in which these programs are financed from the student, employer, educational institution, and governmental programs. The focus of the study should be whether this is even feasible and what impact this will have on our profession.

Recommendation 4: Until such avenues can be guaranteed, affordability, accessibility, and equality will continue to remain the number one concern for the IAFF.

Additional Comments: Both Oregon and Kansas require associate degrees and to this day still have had no impact on increasing salaries. Actually, both lag many states that do not require degrees. The industry should better focus on improving reimbursement or identify other means of financially sustaining EMS before touting that college degrees will be the cure all for wage increases. There are many other technical professions that make higher wages without college degrees. Additionally, there is no proof that a degree will provide any significant improvement to the very technical skillset a paramedic provides. A suggestion moving forward would be to conduct a comparison study on patient outcomes between the degree paramedics and certificate paramedics.