



# CALIFORNIA PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS

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# CALIFORNIA FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION



February 24, 2017

To: California Fire Chiefs  
IAFF Local Union Presidents

From: Mike DuRee, President, California Fire Chiefs Assn.  
Lou Paulson, President, California Professional Firefighters

RE: Coming Together to Heal Our Own

As all of us have become painfully aware, the fire service is coming to terms with the mental and emotional toll our profession inflicts. For some, the pain becomes overwhelming, manifesting in PTSD, substance abuse and sometimes, tragically, suicide.

Late last year, CPF, Cal-Chiefs and the Cal JAC convened a joint Behavioral Health Conference in Sacramento. Nearly 300 chiefs, labor leaders and health and safety personnel heard from the best minds on the subject of behavioral health and listened to the stories of those who had suffered ... often in silence.

At the conference, we announced our intention to move forward together – labor and management – to develop a set of guiding principles, practices and training resources to raise awareness and, if needed, help heal our brothers and sisters.

On an organizational level, here's what we're proposing together:

- ◆ Establish, as a benchmark principle, that **firefighter behavioral health is a core occupational health and safety issue**, just as urgent as traumatic injury, job-related cancer and other critical safety issues;
- ◆ Commit to **working together as labor and management** to meet this health and safety challenge, with the same spirit of cooperation established with the IAFF-IAFC Wellness Fitness Initiative;
- ◆ Establish a **California Fire Service Task Force on Behavioral Health**, to include CPF, Cal-Chiefs, the California Firefighter Joint Apprenticeship Committee (Cal-JAC) as well as Cal-OES. The task force would be charged with developing a detailed set of principles, practices and training concepts covering every area of behavioral health, from peer support to recruit training to, if necessary, legislation.

Finally, and most importantly, we believe the most important step we all must take together is to **end the stigma** by normalizing the issue of behavioral health. No matter how tough, none of us is immune from the anguish that can build from a career of difficult calls. As we've seen all too frequently of late, silence can be fatal.

Each of us will be meeting with our respective executive boards to discuss these and other steps we can take as a profession to protect our brothers and sisters.

Now is the time for us to stand together to bring this issue out of the shadows and into the light. Firefighters are more likely to be afflicted by some kind of behavioral health issue than any other occupational injury. We owe it to these men and women to show the same common commitment to their care and safety that we have had for other health and safety concerns.

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