

Ontario's Paramedics deserve the right to retire at age 60 with full pension

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It's a matter of safety
and fairness.**



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The right to negotiate a normal retirement age of 60

The 5,185 women and men who serve as Ontario's paramedics are asking **Ontario municipalities** to support changes to the OMERS pension plan allowing paramedics the same pension rights as police and firefighters.

These changes would simply allow union locals representing paramedics to have the right to negotiate a normal retirement age of 60 **with full pension** in their workplaces.

Equity with police and firefighters: the federal government agrees

In 2005, the federal government designated paramedics as a Public Safety Occupation (PSO) alongside police and firefighters. **This designation recognizes the public safety nature of paramedics' work and how it can take a toll on the health of these workers.** The PSO designation provides paramedics the opportunity to negotiate pension changes allowing them to leave the workplace earlier.

Like police and firefighters, paramedics provide a public service often under hazardous, high stress conditions. They respond to emergencies, provide medical services and transport patients to hospitals and medical facilities. In many cases, the initial emergency care provided by paramedics is the deciding factor between life and death, temporary or permanent disability, a brief confinement or prolonged hospitalization for a patient.

Working in a job filled with a lifetime of physical and psychological stress, the paramedic occupation can exact a toll on workers. Many find themselves off work with injuries, on long-term disability or having to take early retirement as they reach age 60.

Yet unlike police and firefighters, paramedics are not allowed to retire at 60 years of age with a full pension.

"I want the right to work as long as I can. But if my body is telling me it's time to retire, I need to be able to make the choice to retire at age 60 with a full pension."

Richard Bennett, Paramedic, Sault Ste. Marie

Retiring at 60: A matter of safety and fairness

Like firefighters and police, the work of paramedics requires a high level of medical, psychological and physical fitness. Working in uncontrolled environments, paramedics must:

- Carry heavy equipment including stretchers, defibrillators and oxygen tanks
- Use fine motor skills in drawing up medications, administering IVs, taking blood pressure readings and operating medical equipment
- Communicate with patients and other health care professionals under stressful conditions

Whether it's a car accident, an industrial accident, a chemical spill, a disease outbreak or an emergency home visit, paramedics work in emergency situations dealing with human crises, where errors in judgement or attention can have life-threatening or grave consequences.

Male and female paramedics must often work in dangerous circumstances—being exposed to extreme weather conditions, dangerous chemicals, infectious bacteria or viruses, working in confined locations or on busy roadways.

That's why paramedics deserve the choice to retire at 60 with full pension, like firefighters and police.

No moral or cost justification for denying this right

The reality is that:

- On average, paramedics over the age of 55 represent only 4 per cent of the profession's 5,185 Ontario workforce. That's just over 200 members.
- There is no other job in ambulance services that a worker could transfer to.
- Given the toll the job takes, municipalities may pay more medical and wage loss costs among paramedics aged 60 and over.
- Police and firefighters share the cost to retire at age 60 and paramedics are also willing to pay their fair share.

What you can do

You may have been helped by a paramedic sometime in your life. Many of us have friends, relatives or colleagues who are paramedics.

Please support the women and men who save lives and help deal with emergencies as paramedics.

1. Call your Mayor and/or Councillor today.
2. Ask them to support the right of paramedics to retire with full pension at 60, given their designation as a Public Safety Occupation, by endorsing the proposed changes to OMERS
3. Tell them you agree with the federal government that paramedics deserve the same right as police and firefighters.

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www.opseu.org
www.cupe.on.ca
www.seiulocal1.org
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