



Firefighters are speaking out. Will you stand with us?

Dear Fort Wayne Resident,

Fort Wayne firefighters daily put our health and safety on the line when your family needs help most. Today, we are asking for your support, not only for ourselves, but for the safety of every Fort Wayne resident.

Fire Chief Eric Lahey's decisions are putting public safety, firefighter health and department morale at risk. We have tried every internal route to resolve these concerns, and we've been ignored. Now, we're sharing the truth with you, our neighbors, because you deserve to know what's happening behind the scenes.

1. 95% of over 300 Firefighters Surveyed Have No Confidence in Chief Lahey

In a recent union survey, nearly every firefighter expressed no confidence in his leadership. This is a clear and urgent message from the men and women who serve: trust has collapsed.

2. Understaffing is Putting Citizens and Firefighters at Risk

Fort Wayne needs a minimum of 370 firefighters but currently has 352. Even with incoming recruits, retirements are projected to outpace new hires. Short staffing has forced more than 65 rigs out of service in the past year. Time and location constraints emerge when rigs are shut down, putting Fort Wayne residents at risk of delayed emergency response times. In addition to jeopardizing critical response times, manpower shortages are resulting in unqualified privates being placed in officer roles.

To prevent rig shutdowns, the department is relying heavily on overtime with firefighters volunteering for 48-hour shifts that keep the department operational. In June alone 354 extra shifts were worked by our firefighters. Overtime was meant to be the exception, not the strategy for running the department. This is not sustainable and endangers both fatigued firefighters and public safety.

3. Over \$6.4 Million in Taxpayer Money Overspent with No Plan

Fire Chief Lahey has mismanaged taxpayer dollars. From 2021 to 2024, he overspent the overtime budget by \$6.4 million and has yet to present a solution. Most troubling, he authorized an investigation costing over \$60,000 to target a firefighter, only for it to be revealed that the department had been surveilling the wrong individual the entire time. Additionally, while underfunding the fire department budget, Chief Lahey enjoys a \$160,000 salary and has cashed in his vacation time for thousands in compensation. He has also spent tens of thousands on lawyers instead of working collaboratively with his firefighters.

4. Injured Firefighters Are Denied Support

Firefighters are seriously concerned about how injured firefighters are treated under the current administration. After sustaining burns, firefighters have been transported to hospitals in SUVs instead of ambulances. One firefighter suffered a cardiac event and was dragged from a burning structure to be resuscitated on scene by fellow first responders. He was immediately denied hurt-on-duty coverage, burdening him and his family with **\$190,000** in medical bills for nearly two years. While his expenses were eventually reimbursed, the city still refuses to classify the injury as duty-related. This is not an isolated case. Other firefighters have also been denied support, leaving many unsure if help will be there when they need it most.

5. A Troubling Legal Pattern: 5 Lawsuits

During Chief Lahey's tenure, **five federal lawsuits** have been filed against the City of Fort Wayne directly tied to issues within the fire department. These are the result of systemic leadership failures and a workplace environment that has deteriorated under his direction.

6. Blame Shifting Instead of Leading

Despite taking **two fewer sick days** than the national firefighter average, Lahey continues to push firefighters to take less sick leave rather than addressing the staffing crisis he created. Firefighters currently use an average of (2021-2024) 5.1 days per year, per firefighter for duty related and non-duty related injuries and illnesses.

7. Disregard for Firefighter Traditions

Under Chief Lahey's tenure, community outreach programs have been slashed, these programs had yielded over **\$1,000,000** in donations to Muscular Dystrophy.

8. Retaliation

If we question Lahey's leadership, even professionally, we are targeted and punished. Recently, one firefighter was warned by an Assistant Chief not to attend a meeting with the mayor, for fear of consequences. The Fire Chief has also blocked promotions based on personal vendettas. This isn't leadership, it's intimidation.

What Mayor Sharon Tucker Is Saying

The city has responded by saying, "THIS IS NORMAL", "SUCK IT UP BUTTERCUP", and that everything is going well with the fire department. This is despite former leadership, such as Former Fire Chief Amy Biggs, weighing in to support Fort Wayne firefighters and underscore concerns regarding rig shutdowns and staffing shortages.

The issues we've faced over the past ten years didn't appear overnight; they're the result of failed leadership. It's time to stop pretending otherwise and finally admit what so many already know: *leadership needs to change.*

What Are We Asking for?

We will always show up for you. Now we need you to show up for us. It's time for leadership that restores trust, supports firefighters, protects the public, and brings stability back to the department.

PLEASE SIGN THE PETITION TO REMOVE FIRE CHIEF ERIC LAHEY



With respect and gratitude,

Fort Wayne Metro Firefighters, IAFF Local 124