# Lawmakers Introduce Slew of Bills to Boost Federal Retirement Benefits

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House lawmakers, led by Rep. Gerry Connolly, D-Va., introduced several of bills last week that would improve the retirement benefits earned by federal workers during their time in public service.

One piece of legislation, the Equal COLA Act ([H.R. 1254](https://connolly.house.gov/uploadedfiles/equal_cola_act.pdf)) would increase the annual cost of living adjustment provided to retirees in the Federal Employees Retirement System to match the COLA given to Civil Service Retirement System retirees.

Under the current system, cost of living adjustments for federal employee retirement programs operate on two tiers. While the CSRS adjustment is based on the annual inflation of the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, FERS adds an additional formula onto its COLA calculation, frequently reducing the amount that annuitants receive.

If a cost of living adjustment for CSRS recipients is less than 2 percent, FERS retirees would receive the full amount. But if the COLA is between 2 and 3 percent, FERS annuitants would only receive 2 percent, and if the COLA is more than 3 percent, retirees in FERS would receive that COLA minus 1 percentage point.

In 2019, CSRS retirees received a 2.8 percent cost of living adjustment, meaning FERS retirees only saw a 2 percent increase in their annuity.

“Over time, we now realize that this two-tiered system fails to protect FERS retirees who are living on a fixed income,” Connolly said in a statement. “This legislation will rectify this unfair system and ensure these dedicated public servants are protected throughout their retirement.”

Meanwhile, Connolly and Rep. Jackie Walorski, R-Ind., reintroduced the Federal Firefighter Pay Equity Act ([H.R. 1255](https://connolly.house.gov/uploadedfiles/firerighter_pay_equity.pdf)) last week, a bill that would bring the retirement benefits for more than 15,000 federal workers in line with their counterparts in state and local government.

Currently, unlike state and local firefighters, federal firefighters, who generally work 72-hour weeks, are not credited with the income earned through mandatory overtime for the purposes of calculating their retirement benefits. The legislation introduced last week would incorporate the pay earned through overtime in the annual “average pay” used when calculating a retiring employee’s annuity.

“Thousands of federal firefighters across America . . . risk their lives every day to keep people safe and protect our national security,” Walorski said in a statement. “We have a responsibility to make sure they are treated fairly in retirement. The bipartisan Federal Firefighter Pay Equity Act will ensure these brave and hardworking first responders get the full compensation and benefits they deserve.”

In third bill, Reps. Peter King, R-N.Y., and Jim Langevin, D-R.I., joined Connolly in introducing the First Responder Fair RETIRE Act ([H.R. 1256](https://connolly.house.gov/uploadedfiles/fair_retire_2019.pdf)), which would extend full retirement benefits to a variety of federal law enforcement and public safety employees if they are injured while at work.

First responders in the federal government, including firefighters, law enforcement personnel and U.S. Border Patrol officers among others, participate in an accelerated retirement system, which is called 6c and deducts a higher percentage from their paycheck but features a mandatory retirement age of 57. Additionally, such employees become eligible to retire after serving for 20 years and reaching age 50.

But they currently lose access to this program if they are injured and forced to leave their position or federal service. Connolly, King and Langevin’s bill would allow first responders injured on the job to remain in the 6c system if they take a job elsewhere in the federal government after they return to work. And if they leave federal service altogether, employees would be entitled to a refund of the accelerated contributions.

“Any law enforcement officer or other federal public safety employee who suffers a disabling injury in the line of duty should not be penalized by the very retirement system that ought to recognize their heroic sacrifice and service; but that is exactly what disabled officers face under current law,” said Nathan Catura, national president of the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association. “The First Responder Fair RETIRE Act helps to preserve the retirement status of disabled public safety officers, protects their financial security, and truly honors the sacrifices they have made to keep us safe.”

Thank You

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