

February 2010

Bureau Briefs

A series of short updates on issues followed by the Bureau

Firefighter Contract Arbitration Status

The City of Boston and the firefighters' union, Local 718, IAFF concluded their last arbitration hearing on February 5, 2010 after 18 days of hearings since May 11, 2009. Both sides must present final briefs by April 5th. The City estimates that the arbitrator will issue the arbitration award in early May. If the arbitrator decides on a four-year contract as was negotiated with the four police unions, the contract will expire on June 30, 2010, a month after the award is rendered.

At a time when cities and towns need to react quickly to changing circumstances to manage effectively, the delay in resolving this contract is untenable. Because the 2004 firefighters' contract was an expedited arbitration decision that restricted itself to only wages and paid detail fee changes, there have been no language changes in the Boston firefighters' contract in over eight years. That situation is unacceptable, especially for a vital city service and where the union regularly has been resistant to needed operational improvements.

The two parties are bound by the arbitrator's decision so the last step in this process is up to the City Council. If the decision does not reflect the current fiscal reality, is more generous than the negotiated public safety contracts and reforms are limited, the City Council should be prepared to reject the contract and force the parties to renegotiate a new one.

New Boston Retirement Board Member

On February 18, Mayor Menino appointed Diane Bissonnette Moes to serve on the Boston Retirement Board. She fills the seat vacated by Mitch Weiss when he was selected by the Mayor to be his Chief of Staff. Ms. Moes is Of Council at the law firm of Donoghue Barrett & Signal where she practices in the Health Care Department. She also has experience providing counsel to clients on risk management, fraud and abuse and regulatory compliance which will be of benefit to the Retirement Board. She is an adjunct faculty member of Suffolk University Law School and Trustee of the University of Massachusetts.

Ms. Moes comes to the Board at a time when it is wrestling with efforts to improve operations, streamline application approval and prevent pension abuse.

Quinn Bill Impact on Police Retirements

The paycheck cut in Quinn Bill payments for Boston police officers that started last month is resulting in a larger number of officers filing for retirement as of February 23, 2010. The state cut in its share of the Quinn Bill funding has contributed to filings for retirement for Quinn-eligible officers in Boston being more than three times the number in 2009 at the same time. Thirty (30) Quinn-eligible officers have filed for retirement effective in January, February and March compared with 9 eligible officers that filed in 2009, an increase of 21.