

Dear Mayor McFarland,

Please do not sweep this email under the rug. I am the proud wife of a firefighter and want you to understand the perspective of someone who loves one. If nothing else read the very bottom of this letter to understand what we, as the families of these heroes, go through.

My husband has been running calls since he was old enough to walk. His dad and his uncle were both with a local volunteer Fire Department. No matter where they were or at what time if the bell rang he was in his dad's truck and on his way to witness the coolest things a little boy could ever imagine. He knew that he wanted to be a firefighter at those moments. When he was old enough, he became a volunteer firefighter at the same station as his dad and uncle. He did this because he loved it. He was a volunteer and an explorer. Once he graduated high school, he went straight into the academy because he knew that this is what he wanted to do. He did not care about the salary so much as being able to choose a career that he loved, he knew that he was good at and that he could make a difference in how certain tragic situations could be altered by his hands and his knowledge. It was his calling. He became a full-time firefighter with the City of Raleigh in 1999. I met him shortly after that and loved the fact that he was a firefighter. It gave me something to brag about. After a while I realized that being in a relationship with a firefighter was not all that I thought it would be. We could be watching a movie at home and if he heard a call for his volunteer station he would leave me behind to go serve others. It really made me wonder if this was the kind of life I wanted to live. I was a single parent of a 5 year old boy...was this the kind of life I wanted for my son? I knew that if I wanted that man that I had to accept his passion. Here we are 17 years later and he is still with the department because it is still his calling. And after 2 children I still stand behind and beside him. I believe that it is unfair that these men and women are not being shown any gratuity from the city. They have earned it through their loyalty and dedication. I have told my husband that maybe he needs to look into other city or town fire departments that recognize and support the needs of their firefighters. Where they are shown that their duties are important and necessary in order to have a well established and appreciated community. But my husband's loyalty has been challenged by the City of Raleigh. Your luck with new and future firefighters that know they can elsewhere, as they already are, might not be so re-assuring. It's becoming more and more expensive to live and some of these men are not able to, because instead of getting the compensation they deserve, the city is penalizing them and costing them more money through insurance. I understand that the comment was that you

can't for one department and not the other...I don't know of any other department, except for the police department who I support as well, put their lives on the line every day. You really need to re-think about the level of service that these men and women are willing to provide...their loyalty is unwavering and you need to show them that they are important. **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS!!** as I'm sure you have said before. Please read the below of what it is like day to day for us because this is a day to day.

Sadly, I feel like so many girls get wrapped up in the fantasy of being married to a firefighter, yet don't have the first clue what it takes to actually be married to one. You see, for us real wives this is not just a bragging right, a status update, or a chance to wear cute little shirts that say I'm married to a firefighter. Our husbands don't walk around topless with their bunker gear on like some scene out of the calendar you have hanging on your wall. The truth is, being a fire wife is rarely glamorous. It's extremely lonely nights, followed by long days. It's having to be mom and dad, even when you know some times you just can't fill those shoes. It's trying to convince your family, friends, and yourself, that you are still married even though you have been to every family function and holiday get together alone for the past 3 years. Being a fire wife is understanding that even when your fireman is home, his mind may not be. His body may be tired and knowing he truly wants to see his family and spend time with them, but he desperately needs sleep, because tomorrow starts another 24 hour shift. Most importantly, it's being able to tell when he walks through the door, that last night was just one of those nights. He doesn't mean to be moody or distant, but he just hasn't been able to suppress those images or memories of the call he made the day before. It is not easy. It takes understanding, compassion and an unwavering love for the man behind the badge. You see we didn't marry a firefighter. We fell in love with a man who happens to be one. If you get in to this life just for the badge, you will never make it. There is a reason there are more ex-wives of firefighters than there are current wives. But for those of us who are here to stay, we would not trade this life for anything in the world. We will take the bad with good every day, because we know being a firefighter isn't just our husband's job, it's his calling.

With Regards,

Michelle Brantley