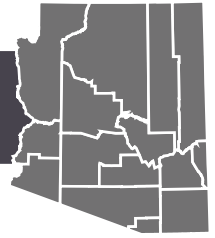


RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ARIZONA'S  
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRE SERVICE PERSONNEL



Arizona Fire Service  
Retention Survey



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**Cover Photos:**

(Right) Phoenix Fire Department

## Key Findings

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The purpose of this study was to survey Arizona firefighters about their perceptions of their work, levels of job satisfaction, and the impact of certain employment factors on retention. In addition to presenting the results from our entire survey sample, we also analyzed the data by urban/rural and age subgroups to explore different preferences and perceptions among firefighters in different geographical contexts and age cohorts. In this study, urban areas are defined as the Phoenix Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and Tucson MSA, which includes Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties. The rest of the counties are categorized as rural areas. This division is based on the commonly accepted perceptions of those areas in terms of firefighter job characteristics.

With the findings from this survey, we have attempted to answer the first research question put forward by the working group: *Is there a consistent statewide challenge in retention for PSPRS positions? If so, how big is the problem?*

### **Most respondents intend to stay in the profession until retirement, although this intention varies by age.**

Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated they intend to stay in a fire service career until retirement. When asked more specifically about the likelihood they will be in the fire service at certain time points (e.g., 6 months from now, 1 year from now, 2 years from now, etc.), respondents in most age groups were between somewhat and extremely likely to still be in the fire service in 5 years. In 10 years, however, the likelihood reduced, particularly among respondents ages 36 to 45.

### **Despite their intention to stay, turnover among firefighters may be relatively frequent.**

Although the survey cannot offer a precise measure of firefighter turnover, respondent data indicates that it may be at least somewhat common. For the 63 jurisdictions present in the sample, 53 had at least one respondent report they knew of at least one colleague who left their position in the past six months for a reason other than retirement.

### **Many respondents estimate they would leave the fire service if they left their current position.**

When asked what career path they would take if they left their current position, 51% of respondents stated they would leave the fire service entirely. This response was the second most common response (after retirement). For those who estimated they would stay in the fire service, staying in the same jurisdiction at a different rank was the most common response.

### **Respondents are least satisfied with their base salary when it comes to benefits.**

When asked their satisfaction with various benefits, 28% of respondents indicated they were dissatisfied with their annual base salary – the highest percentage of respondents that were dissatisfied with any benefit, whether monetary or non-monetary. In contrast, greater than 65% of the sample responded they were satisfied with their opportunities for promotion, paid sick leave, and pension and other retirement benefits. A higher proportion of respondents in urban areas were satisfied with every benefit when compared with rural respondents; and employees 25 years old or younger and 56 years old or older are more satisfied than their peers in the middle of the age distribution.

**Job security is the most common motivation for continuing to work as a firefighter.**

A majority of respondents (89%) strongly agreed or agreed that job security was a motivation for continuing to work as a firefighter. Other motivations also received strong agreement, including sharing a sense of comradery with colleagues, doing challenging and exciting work, and having a sense of purpose in helping others. All of these motivations received greater than 80% agreement. When broken out by geography, more urban respondents agree that job security is a motivator while a greater percentage of rural respondents agree with the three non-security factors above.

**Turnover factors differ by geography.**

The five factors impacting turnover that received the most agreement from all participants were mental demands and stress, sleep deprivation, impacts of the job on family life, pay and benefits, and support from management. While these five factors received the most agreement from both rural and urban participants, the level of agreement varied by geography. Rural respondents agreed that pay and benefits were a turnover factor more strongly than urban respondents, while urban respondents most strongly agreed that non-monetary factors like sleep deprivation, stress, impacts on family life, and medical/chemical exposure were factors.

**For respondents who moved positions, pay was the top reason for leaving.**

Some respondents indicated they had worked in another firefighter position prior to their current position. When asked their reasons for leaving their prior position, seeking an increase in pay was the most common response, closely followed by seeking an increase in benefits. Seeking a department with better morale, better work-life balance, and other reasons were less frequently cited.

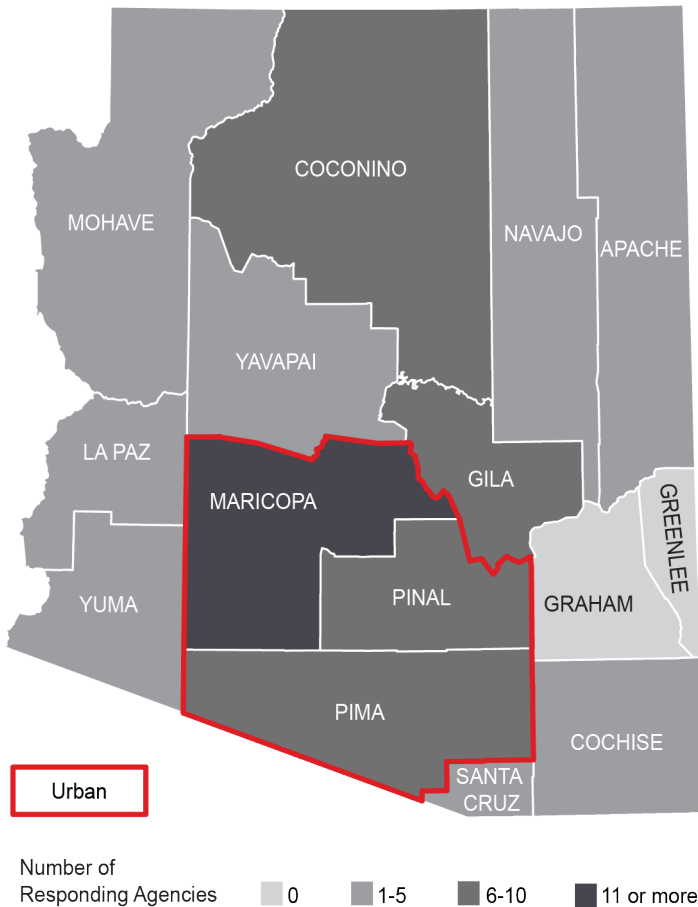
## Survey Data Analysis

### Demographic Information and Work History

#### Respondents' Geography

We received 1850 responses to the firefighter retention survey. These responses represent 63 fire departments/districts in 13 out of the 15 counties in Arizona (see Figure 1). Of the 63 agencies, 54% are urban, and 46% are rural. Of the 1850 respondents, 1359 were from urban areas, 302 were from rural areas, and 189 did not respond when asked where they are employed (see Table 1.) As mentioned in “Key Findings,” urban areas in this study are defined as the Phoenix Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and Tucson MSA, which includes Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties. All other counties are categorized as rural areas.

**Figure 1. Number of agencies with employees who responded, by county.**



**Table 1. Number of respondents by county.**

County	Number of Respondents
Maricopa	1074
Pima	225
Unidentified	189
Mohave	87
Coconino	66
Pinal	60
Yuma	46
Yavapai	37
Santa Cruz	22
Gila	20
Cochise	18
La Paz	3
Apache	2
Navajo	1
Graham	0
Greenlee	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1850</b>

## Respondents' Demographics and Work History

**Table 2. Demographic profile of survey respondents.**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
21 and under	16	0.9
22 - 25	88	4.8
26 - 30	164	8.9
31 - 35	223	12.1
36 - 40	307	16.6
41 - 45	287	15.5
46 - 50	244	13.2
51 - 55	203	11
56 - 60	111	6
61 - 65	37	2
66 and above	4	0.2
No answer	166	9
<b>Gender</b>		
Man	1561	84.4
Woman	94	5.1
Prefer not to say	14	0.8
Other	13	0.7
No answer	168	9.1
<b>Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin</b>		
No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	1220	65.9
Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano	237	12.8
Yes, Puerto Rican	6	0.3
Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin (specify)	56	3
Prefer Not to Say	104	5.6
No answer	227	12.3
<b>Race</b>		
American Indian or Alaska Native	7	0.4
Asian	13	0.7
Black or African American	23	1.2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	8	0.4
White	1363	73.7
Other	94	5.1
Prefer not to say	108	5.8
No answer	234	12.6
<b>Current rank/position</b>		
Firefighter	628	33.9
Company Officer	494	26.7
Engineer	313	16.9
Other <sup>i</sup>	248	13.4
No answer	167	9
<b>Worked at a different fire department/district before?</b>		
Yes	711	41.20
No	1,006	58.30
Prefer not to say	8	0.50

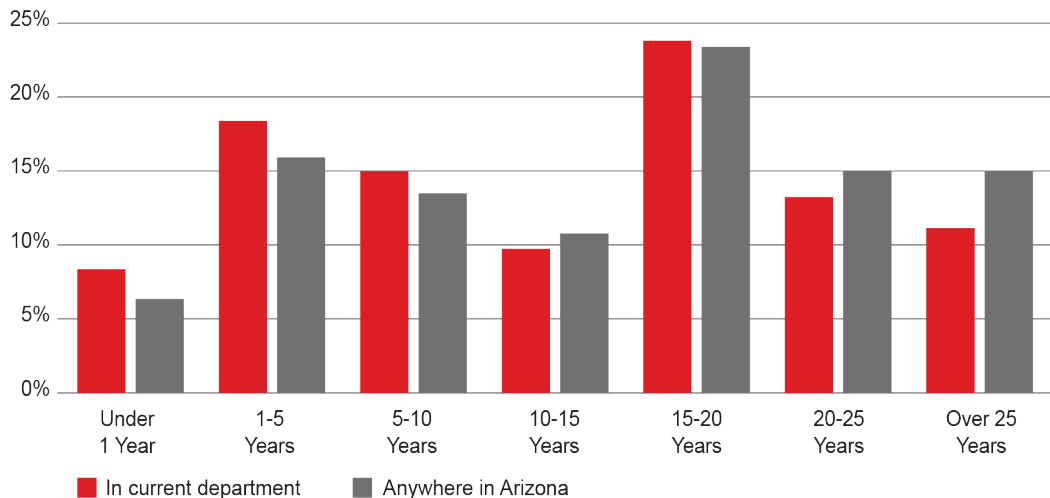
<sup>i</sup> "Other" in this category includes paramedic, inspector, emergency medical technician, deputy chief, battalion chief, and fire chief.

## Baseline Measures of Job Satisfaction and Retention Likelihood

### Work History and Employment Trends

To understand the work history of respondents, we asked two questions: *For how long have you been working as a firefighter in your current jurisdiction/department?* and *For how long have you been working as a full-time firefighter anywhere in Arizona?* Data shows employees who worked for 15-20 years had the highest response rate to the survey.

Figure 2. Duration of work history as a firefighter.<sup>ii</sup>



ii N=1841 (current department); N=1824 (anywhere in Arizona)

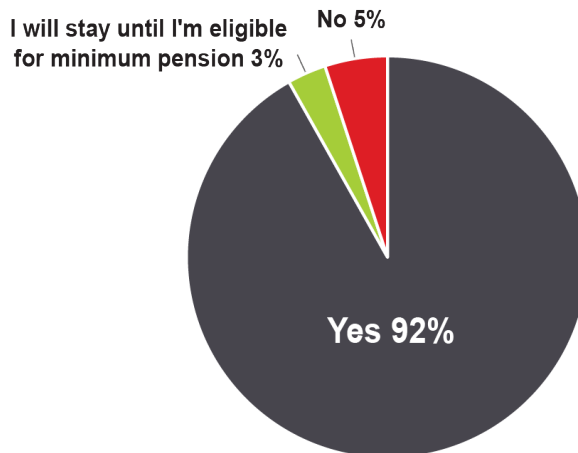
Of the respondents, 41.2% indicated they had worked for a different fire department/district prior to their current position (see Table 2). This rate seems high; however, we should understand that respondents have work histories that range under one year to over 25 years, with 15-20 years being the most common response for work history (see Figure 2). Therefore, lateral transfers may be quite infrequent, depending on the length of any given career in the fire service.

In response to the question, *“Have any of your co-workers left the agency in the last 6 months (not counting retirement)?”* people from 53 jurisdictions reported yes, while people from 30 jurisdictions reported no. In some cases, jurisdictions had some respondents who answered yes while others answered no. We can also assume there are some respondents who answered no that are employed at agencies where colleagues have left in the last six months but do not have personal knowledge of these exits. In contrast, respondents who answer yes are likely to have direct or indirect knowledge of colleagues who exit their positions. Considering the majority of jurisdictions had at least one respondent who answered yes, this data hints at employee exits being quite common. Even if any jurisdiction that received even a single no response is counted as having no employees exit, more than half (33) of jurisdictions have still experienced personnel exits in the last six months. This may indicate that employees leaving their positions is a relatively frequent occurrence.

## Benefits

Firefighter jobs have a reputation for being attractive because of job stability and benefits. Our survey data reflects this reputation; only 5% of the respondents indicated they would leave their public safety career before they are eligible for pension benefits through the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS). Not all benefits under PSPRS are uniform, however; a tier system divides PSPRS members into three tiers based on the date one was first hired into a PSPRS-eligible position.<sup>1</sup> Tier 1 members were hired into an eligible position on or before January 1, 2012; their retirement generally requires 20 years of service but members can retire at any age.<sup>2</sup> Tier 2 members were hired between January 1, 2012-July 1, 2017, and must generally be at least 52.5 and complete 15 years or more of service to be eligible for retirement.<sup>3</sup> Tier 3 members were hired after July 1, 2017, and have a retirement minimum age of 55 and a requirement fifteen years of service.<sup>4</sup> There are also discrepancies among the three tiers in terms of the percentage of average salary an employee can receive after retirement (i.e., minimum and maximum pension payouts.)<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 3. Respondents' intentions to stay in PSPRS employment until full pension<sup>iii</sup>**



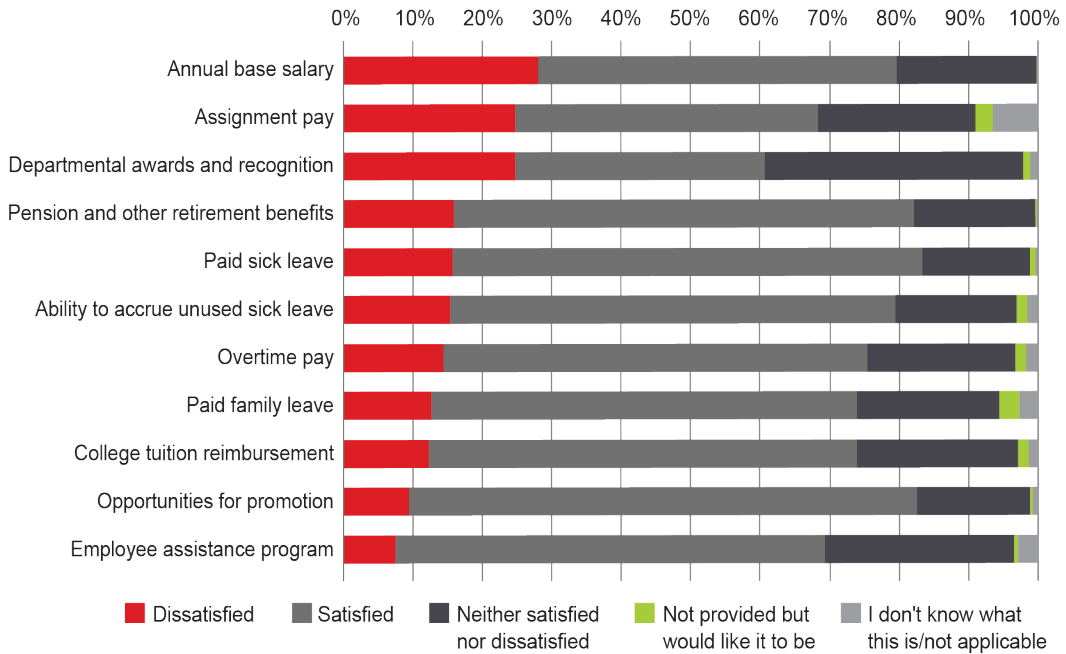
iii N=1826

## Satisfaction with Benefits

For every benefit asked about in the survey, there is a higher percentage of respondents who indicated feeling satisfied with that benefit than dissatisfied (Figure 4). This holds true for both monetary and non-monetary benefits. However, there are some differences in satisfaction between specific benefits. For monetary benefits, pension and other retirement benefits, paid sick leave, overtime pay, and paid family leave had the highest percentage of respondents indicating satisfaction. For non-monetary benefits, opportunities for promotion, the ability to accrue unused sick time, and employee assistance programs had the highest percentage of respondents indicating satisfaction. In contrast, annual base salaries and assignment pay had the highest percentage of dissatisfaction of all monetary benefits, while departmental awards and recognition had the highest percentage of dissatisfaction of all non-monetary benefits.



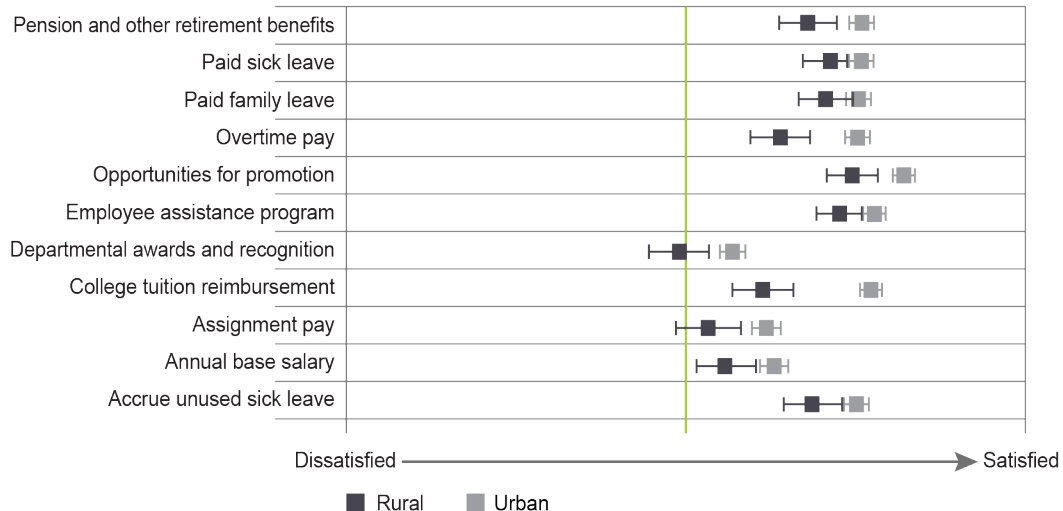
**Figure 4. Satisfaction towards specific monetary and non-monetary benefits<sup>iv</sup>**



<sup>iv</sup> N=1796 for annual base salary; N=1790 for assignment pay and overtime pay; N=1791 for departmental awards and recognition; N=1794 for pension and other retirement benefits; N=1792 for paid sick leave, college tuition reimbursement, and employee assistance program; N=1787 for ability to accrue unused sick leave; N=1789 for paid family leave; N=1795 for opportunities for promotion.

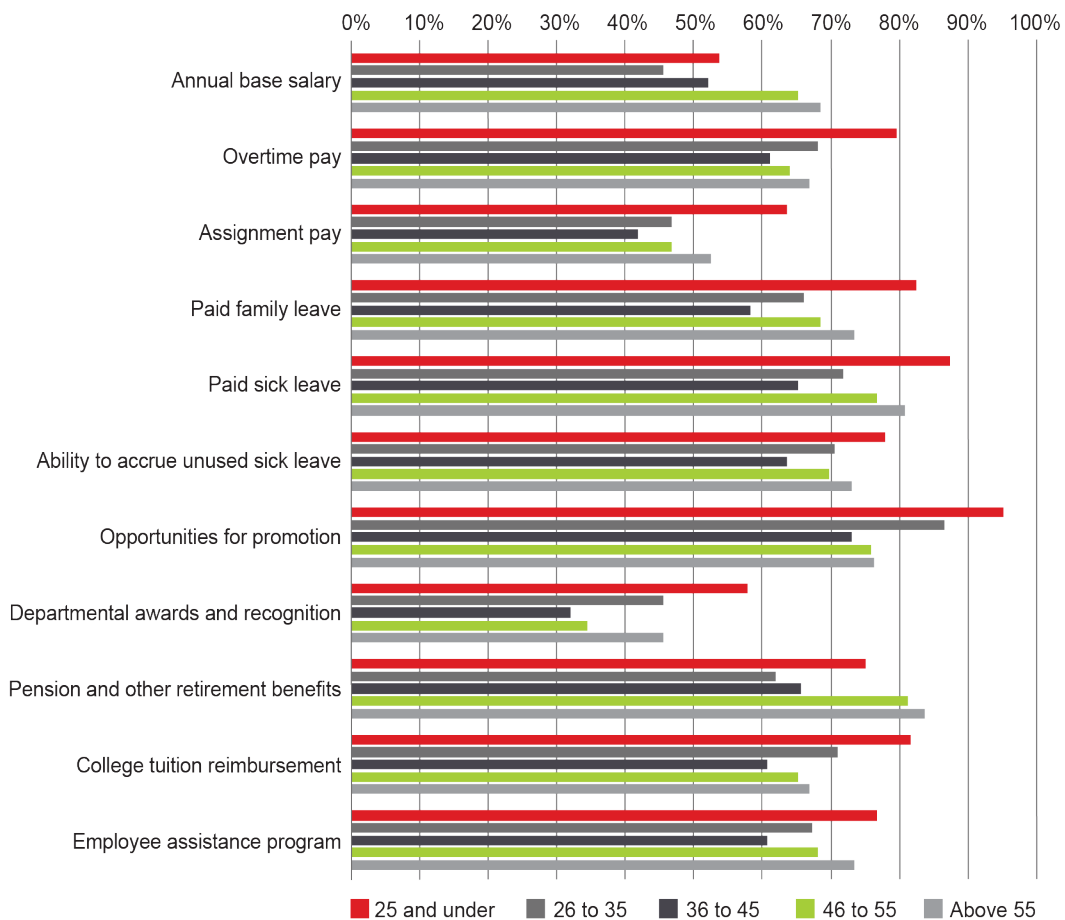
We then looked at differences in satisfaction between respondents in urban and rural areas. Figure 5 shows the difference in each specific benefit with a 95% confidence interval. For every monetary and non-monetary benefit asked about in the survey, urban respondents are more satisfied than their rural peers. Satisfaction towards college tuition reimbursement, overtime pay, and opportunities for promotion have the largest discrepancy between urban and rural respondents.

**Figure 5. Satisfaction towards monetary and non-monetary benefits by urban and rural respondents with 95% confidence intervals**



We also compared the percentage of respondents who were satisfied with monetary and non-monetary benefits by age group. The 25 and under age group was generally more likely to be satisfied across all benefits compared to other age groups. One exception to this is that the 25 and under age group is slightly less likely to be satisfied with annual base salary and pension and other retirement benefits than the 46 to 55 and above 55 age groups. However, age group 25 and under is still more likely to be satisfied with those benefits than the 26 to 45 age group. The above 55 group has the second highest percentage of satisfied respondents, although they are less likely to be satisfied than the 26 to 35 age group with the opportunity for promotion. The age 36 to 45 group appears to be the least likely to be satisfied and is only slightly more likely to be satisfied with their annual base salary and pension and other retirement benefits than the age 26- 35 group. In all other respects, this group is the least likely to be satisfied (Figure 6).

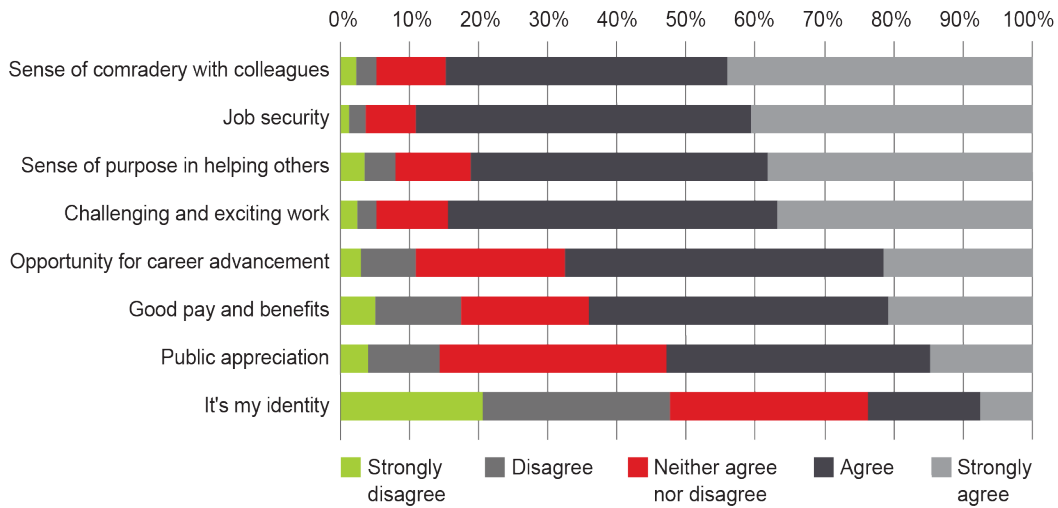
**Figure 6. Satisfaction towards monetary and non-monetary benefits by age groups**



**Motivation**

We then asked respondents about their motivations to continue working as a firefighter. Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed that each factor contributed to their desire to remain in the career. *Job security* was the top choice, with 89% of the respondents selecting either agree or strongly agree. The next most frequently chosen factors were a *sense of comradery with colleagues*, *challenging and exciting work*, and *sense of purpose in helping others*, all of which had over 80% of respondents who selected agree or strongly agree.

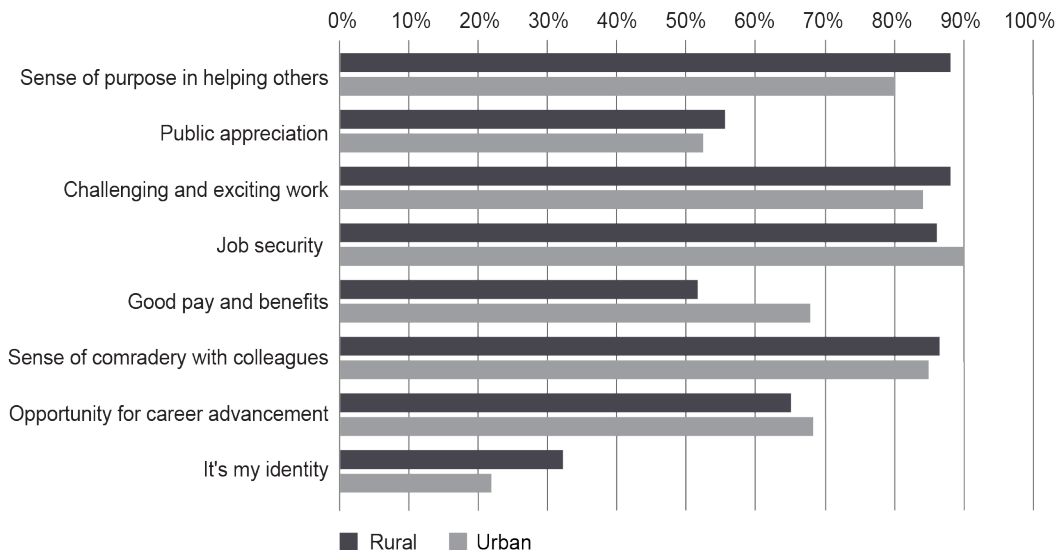
**Figure 7. Motivation to continue working as a firefighter<sup>v</sup>**



<sup>v</sup> N=1777 for challenging and exciting work; N=1778 for sense of purpose in helping others, public appreciation, sense of comradery with colleagues, opportunity for career advancement, and it's my identity; N=1779 for good pay and benefits; N=1980 for job security.

When looking at the motivation question broken out by differences between respondents in urban and rural areas in terms of motivation, we aggregated the strongly agree and agree options to one category (agree) and the strongly disagree and disagree options into another category (disagree). Results show that a *sense of purpose in helping others, challenging and exciting work, a sense of comradery with colleagues, and job security* received the highest percentage of respondents indicating agreement regardless of urban or rural status. However, rural firefighters are more likely to agree that these factors impact their retention than their urban peers, while urban respondents are more likely to acknowledge job security as a retention factor (see Figure 8). *It's my identity* was the factor least likely to receive agreement among both rural and urban respondents.

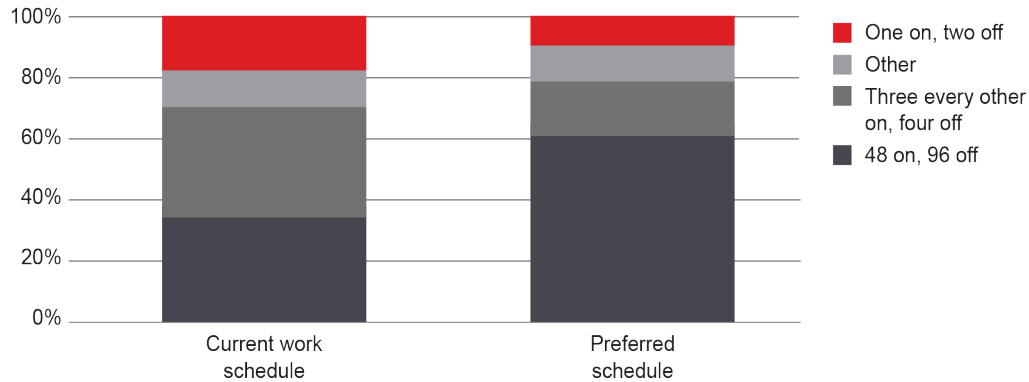
**Figure 8. Motivation to continue working as a firefighter by urban and rural respondents**



### Work Schedule

In the survey, we provided respondents with the option to select their preferred work schedule from a list of the most common work schedules among fire departments (see Figure 9.) *One on, two off*, and *three every other on, four off* both use days as the scheduling unit, while *48 on, 96 off* uses the hour as the scheduling unit. The largest percentage of respondents chose *48 on, 96 off* as their preferred work schedule. This schedule is also one of the most commonly adopted among all the responding jurisdictions.

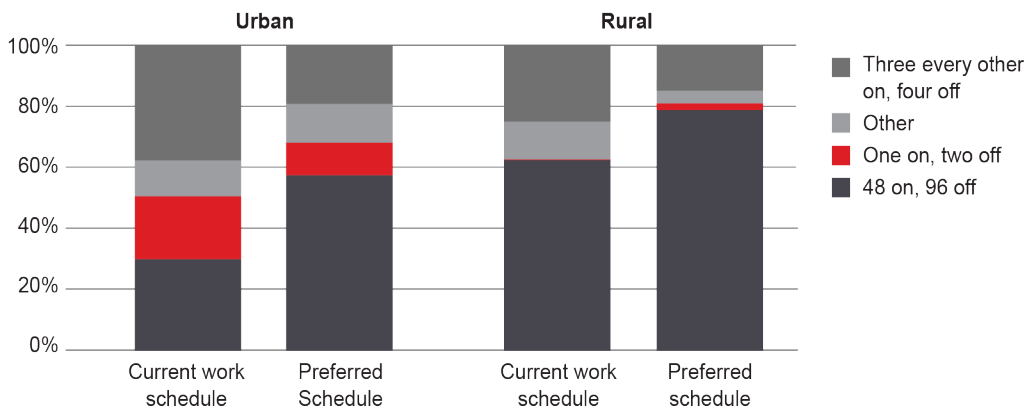
**Figure 9. Current work schedule vs. preferred schedule<sup>vi</sup>**



vi N=1775 for the work schedule question, N=1768 for the preferred work schedule question.

For the twenty respondents who provided their own responses using the *other* option, 80% said they either work a 5/6 schedule or specified they prefer the *five every other on, six off* schedule. Another schedule mentioned by some respondents in the other option is four 10-hour shifts.

**Figures 10 & 11. Current work schedule vs. preferred schedule by urban and rural respondents<sup>vii</sup>**



vii For the work schedule question, N=1423 for urban respondents, N=314 for rural respondents. For the preferred work schedule question, N=1418 for urban respondents, N=311 for rural respondents.

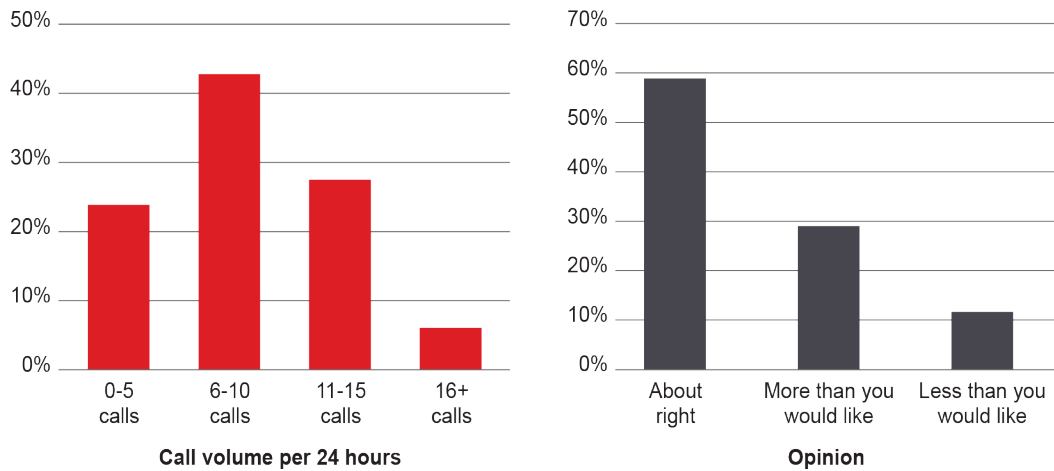
For rural respondents, *48 on, 96 off* is the dominant schedule; for urban respondents, the *three every other on, four off* is a more common schedule, although only half of the respondents in the urban area who currently have that schedule wish to keep it. In both urban and rural areas, a majority of respondents prefer the *48 on, 96 off* schedule.

### Call Volume

To understand respondents' perception of call volumes, we asked their estimation of the average call volume per 24-hour time increment in their current department/district, at their currently assigned station. We also analyze urban and rural independently to explore potential differences in current call volume as well as preferred call volume.

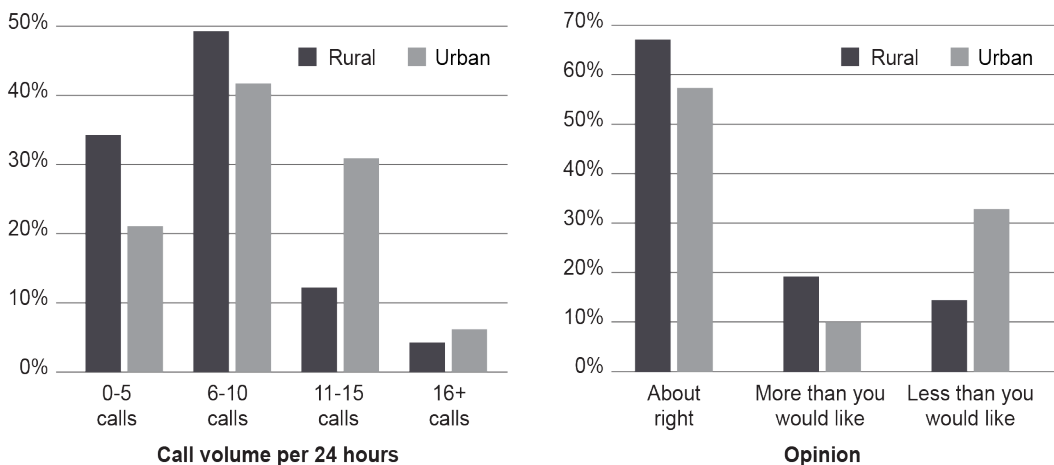
Data shows 43% of the respondents estimate their call volume to be between 6 and 10 calls per 24 hours (see Figure 13); for rural respondents, however, 49% of respondents estimate between 6 and 10 calls per 24 hours compared to 42% of urban respondents. There is a higher percentage of rural respondents who estimate their call volume to be 0 to 5 calls per 24 hours; while more urban respondents who estimate their call volume is above 10 calls per 24 hours. The majority of respondents (59% overall, 67% rural, 57% urban) think the call volume they experience is about right for an optimal workload. While 33% of urban respondents indicate the call volume is higher than they would like, only 14% feel the call volume is too high. Further, 19% of the rural respondents find the call volume is too low, while just 10% of the urban respondents agree (see Figure 14).

**Figures 12 & 13. Call volume and opinion on call volume<sup>viii</sup>**



viii N=1750 for call volume per 24 hour; N=1774 for opinion on call volume.

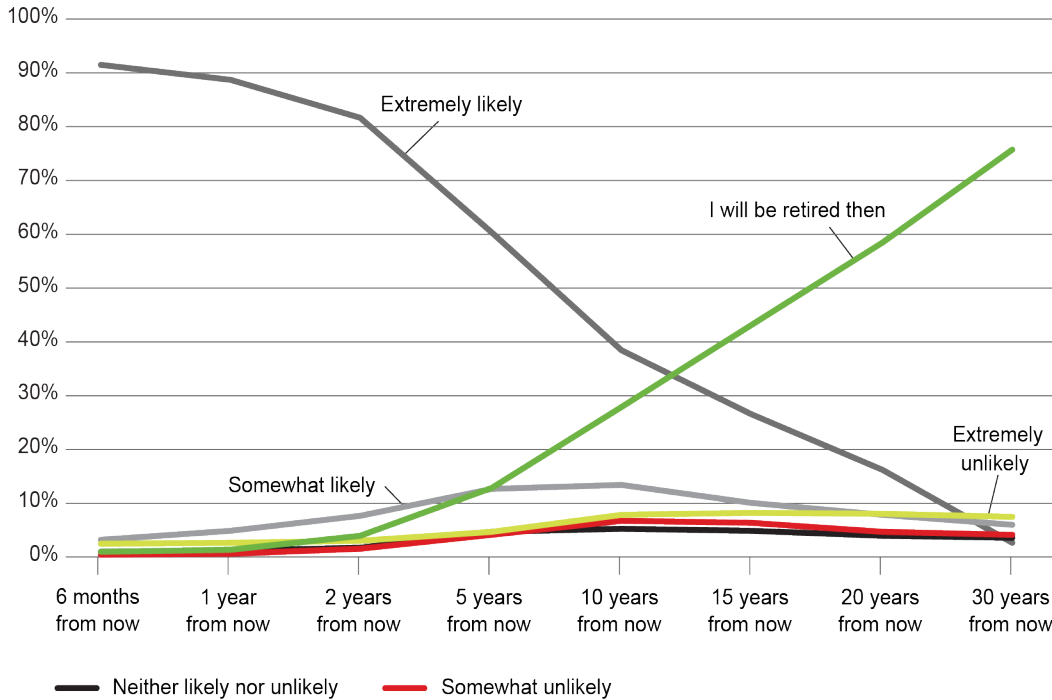
**Figures 14 & 15. Call volume and opinion on call volume by urban and rural respondents**



## Retention and Turnover Factors

### Likelihood of Continuing to Work as a Firefighter in Arizona

Figure 16. Likelihood of continuing to work as a firefighter in Arizona<sup>ix</sup>

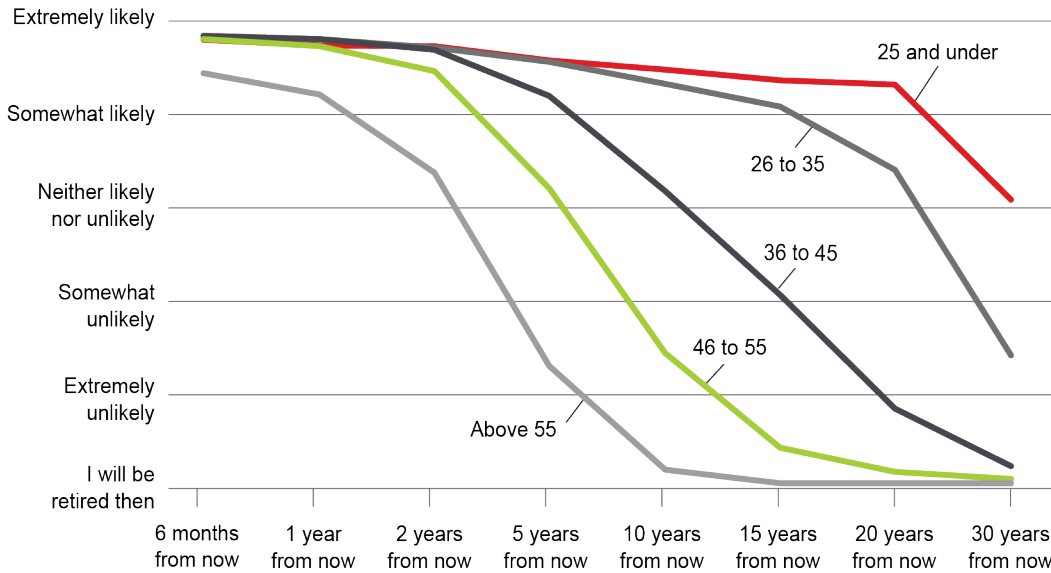


ix N=1708 for 6 months from now; N=1705 for 1 year from now; N=1699 for 2 years from now; N=1698 for 5 years from now; N=1686 for 10 years from now; N=1679 for 15 years from now and 20 years from now; N=1666 for 30 years from now.

The survey asked respondents to estimate the likelihood they would still be working as a firefighter in Arizona at various time points. As shown in Figure 16, 82% of the respondents reported they are extremely likely to still be working as a firefighter in Arizona *two years from now*. There is a sharp downward trend, however, between *two* and *five years from now* as the number of respondents who think they will stay as a firefighter drops to 60% at the *five years from now* time point.

Figure 17 shows these same trends by age group. Age 25 and under is the most stable group, estimating themselves to have a high likelihood of staying as a firefighter in Arizona even 20 years from now. Respondents between age 26 to 35 are highly likely to stay up to another 15 years from now. All age groups show a similar pattern of stability, estimating they will remain as firefighters until their retirement age. This is consistent with the previous finding that 95% of the respondents intended to stay in their career until they are eligible for full PSPRS pension benefits (see Figure 3.)

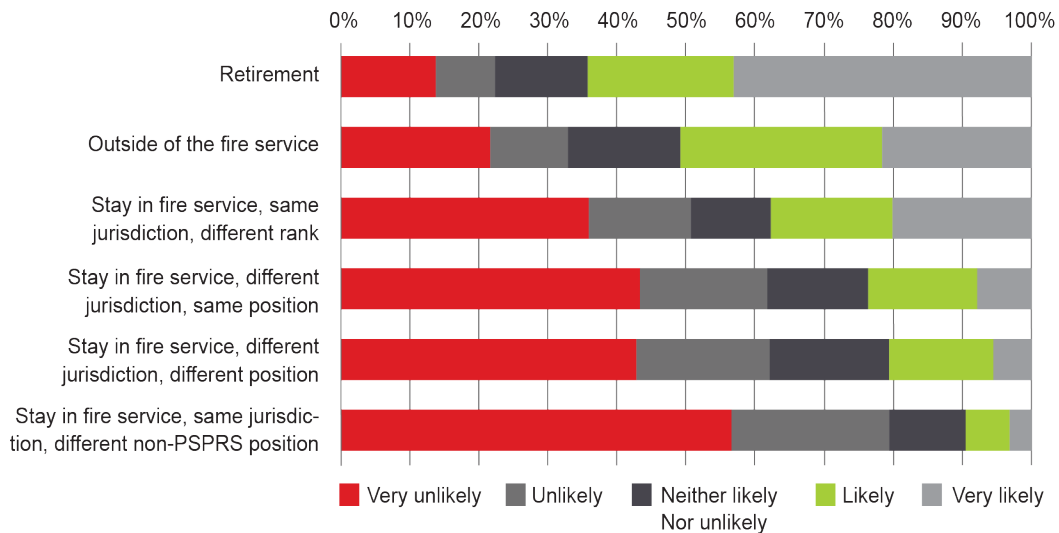
**Figure 17. Likelihood of continuing to work as a firefighter in Arizona by age**



**Alternative Career Paths**

During the survey, respondents were asked *If you were to leave your current position, how likely would you be to pursue each of the following alternative career paths?* The most frequently chosen option is *retirement*, with those who answered likely and very likely comprising 64% of all responses. The next most commonly selected option is *outside of the fire service*, with 51% of the respondents indicating likely or very likely. This exceeds the percentages of respondents who selected an option that includes staying with the fire service in a different capacity. For those who indicated they would remain with the fire service, more are willing to stay in the same jurisdiction with a different rank than move to a different jurisdiction.

**Figure 18. Likelihood of alternative career paths\***

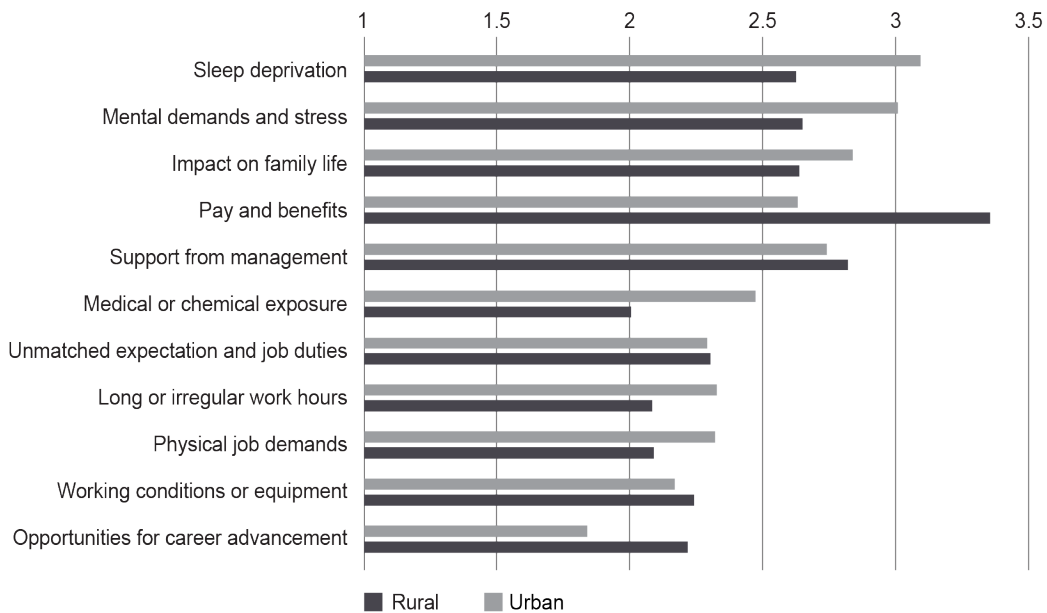


x N=1714 for retirement and stay in fire service, different jurisdiction, same position; N=1711 for outside of the fire service; N= 1716 for stay in fire service, same jurisdiction, different rank; N=1708 for stay in fire service, different jurisdiction, different position; N=1712 for stay in fire service, same jurisdiction, different non-PSPRS position.

## Factors Contributing to Turnover

The survey listed factors that could potentially negatively impact firefighter turnover. Respondents were then asked to rate the extent to which they think these factors contribute to turnover. The scale provided in the question included: extremely strong contributor; strong contributor; moderately a contributing factor; and not a contributing factor. Results show that the top five factors contributing to turnover include sleep deprivation, mental demands and stress, impact on family life, pay and benefits, and support from management. On the other hand, opportunities for career advancement, working conditions or equipment, physical job demands, long or irregular work hours, and unmatched expectations and job duties are not very important contributing factors.

**Figure 19. Contributing factors to turnover<sup>xi</sup>**



<sup>xi</sup> N=1750 for sleep deprivation, medical or chemical exposure, and opportunities for career advancement; N=1749 for support from management, impact on family life, unmatched expectation and job duties, and working conditions or equipment; N=1746 for mental demands and stress, pay and benefits; N=1748 for long or irregular work hours and physical job demands.

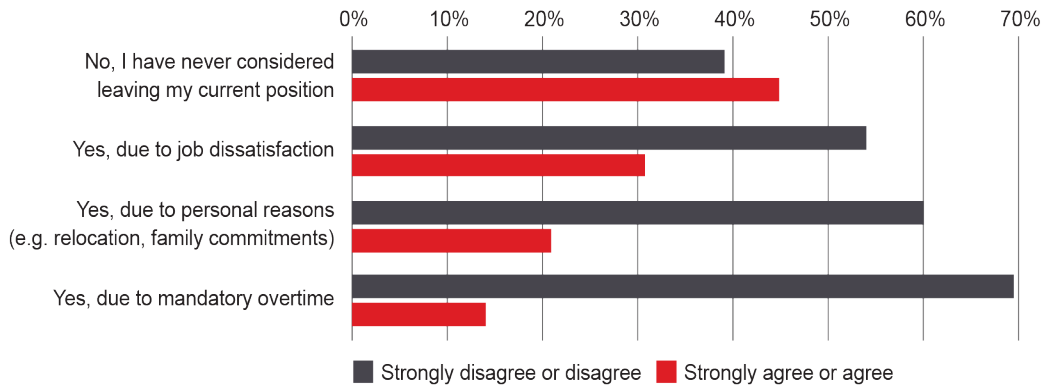
Although both urban and rural respondents agreed on the top five contributing factors to turnover, there are differences in the perceptions of specific factors. For example, rural respondents rated pay and benefits as a stronger contributing factor than urban respondents. 99% of the rural respondents think pay and benefits are a contributing factor (defined as a rating of extremely strong/strong/moderate), compared to 88% of urban respondents. Urban respondents believe sleep deprivation, mental demands and stress, impact on family life, and medical or chemical exposure are more important factors to turnover than the rural respondents.

## Reasons for Leaving Current Position

The survey also asked if the respondents had ever considered leaving their current firefighting position and if so, what potential reasons they had for leaving. We also asked respondents who had previously left a firefighting position why they did so. Across all respondents, 45% have never considered leaving their current position, while 39% have. 31% of the respondents agree that job dissatisfaction is a factor in their decision to consider leaving, 21% agree that personal reasons are a factor, and 14% agree that mandatory overtime is a factor.



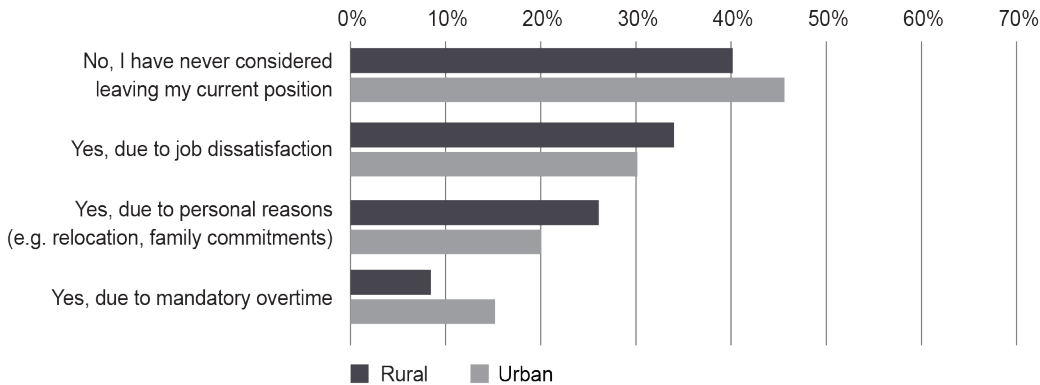
**Figure 20. Considered leaving current position<sup>xii</sup>**



<sup>xii</sup> N=1682 for yes, due to job dissatisfaction; N=1669 for yes, due to personal reasons (e.g. relocation, family commitments); N=1671 for yes, due to mandatory overtime; N=1722 for no, I have never considered leaving my current position.

More than half of the respondents in both urban and rural areas have considered leaving their current position, but a higher percentage of urban respondents have never considered leaving their current position than rural respondents. A higher percentage of rural respondents indicated they had considered leaving due to job dissatisfaction and personal reasons, while a higher percentage of the urban respondents cited mandatory overtime (see Figure 20).

**Figure 21. Percent of urban and rural respondents who agree factors contributed to considering leaving position.**



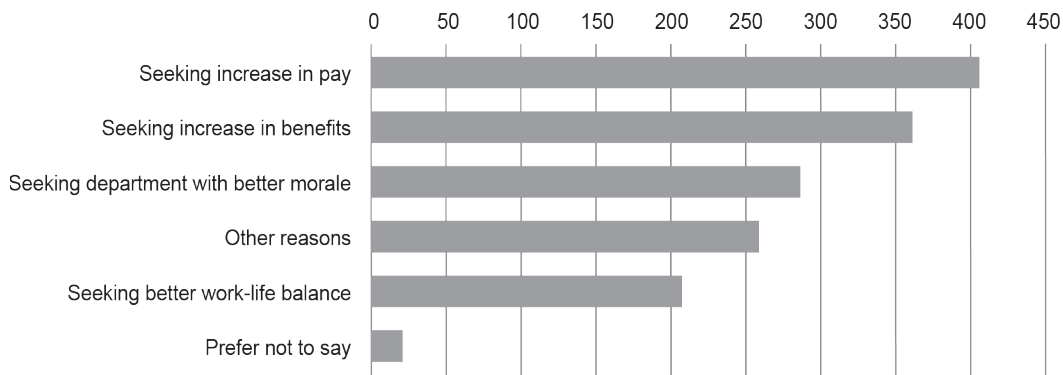
Among the different age groups, 73% of the 25 and under group have never considered leaving their position, while 59% of the above 55 age group have never considered leaving. In contrast, only 37% of respondents in age groups 36 to 45 indicated they had never considered leaving their current position. The most common reason for considering leaving among this age group is due to job dissatisfaction. Of the respondents in the 26 to 35 group who considered leaving, 53% indicated this was due to mandatory overtime. Personal reasons (e.g., relocation, family commitments) are less prevalent compared to other two reasons (see Figure 22).

**Figure 22. Percent agreement for factors contributing to considering leaving position by age.**



These findings are consistent with the differences between age groups shown in Figure 6. Respondents between 26 and 55 are more likely to have considered leaving when compared to the youngest and oldest age groups, and also are less likely to be satisfied with benefits.

**Figure 23. Reasons for leaving previous fire department/district position<sup>xiii</sup>**



<sup>xiii</sup> N=1540.

As previously noted, the survey asked those who worked for another fire department/district prior to their current position to select their reasons for leaving that prior position. This question allowed for multiple answers from the same respondent by allowing them to select all responses that applied. Overall, *seeking an increase in pay* and *seeking an increase in benefits* were the most commonly cited reasons for leaving previous employment as a firefighter.

We also compared urban and rural respondents' reasons for leaving a prior position, ranking them based on the frequency of selection. For urban respondents, *seeking a department with better morale* was a more common answer than *seeking better work-life balance*, while the opposite was true for rural respondents.

**Table 3. Rating of reasons of for leaving previous position by urban and rural respondents**

Rating	Urban	Rural
1	Seeking increase in pay	Seeking increase in pay
2	Seeking increase in benefits	Seeking increase in benefits
3	Seeking department with better morale	Seeking better work-life balance
4	Other reasons	Seeking department with better morale
5	Seeking better work-life balance	Other reasons
6	Prefer not to say	Prefer not to say

There was also an open-ended *other* option, where respondents could type in other factors they identified as impacting their decision to leave. The factors they identified were:

- 1. A change in rank or position:** Examples included changing from an EMT to a sworn office position; changing from a private to a public agency; becoming a full-time firefighter; and getting promotions.
- 2. Quality of life factors:** These included items like wanting to live in a different area, wanting to be closer to home, wanting a better commute, and looking for a safer work environment.
- 3. Life events:** Typical life events included joining the military or looking for more work experience.
- 4. Looking for more:** This category of open-ended response captures factors that prompted respondents to leave a position to pursue work-related goals, such as joining a bigger department, working with better equipment, searching for a promotion, receiving better support from local government, or working with higher call volumes and more fires.

### Factors Contributing to Retention

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of factors that may impact the retention of firefighter employees, with one being the most important factor and six being the least important. Results are reported here based on the frequency with which each factor occupied a rating (i.e., *offer better pay and benefits* was most commonly ranked as one, etc.)

**Table 4. Rating of factors that impact retention of firefighter personnel**

Rating	Retention factors
1	Offer better pay and benefits
2	Improve working conditions or equipment
3	Member driven input on department decisions
4	Provide more opportunities for career advancement
5	Improve communication and feedback
6	Offer more training and development opportunities

We then compared respondents who had considered leaving their position to those who had never considered leaving to see if there were differences in their ratings of factors that impact retention. The ratings from respondents who had never considered leaving were the same as the ratings from all respondents. The ratings from respondents who had considered leaving have only one difference from the ratings from all respondents: this group rated *improve communication and feedback* fourth and *provide more opportunities for career advancement* fifth.

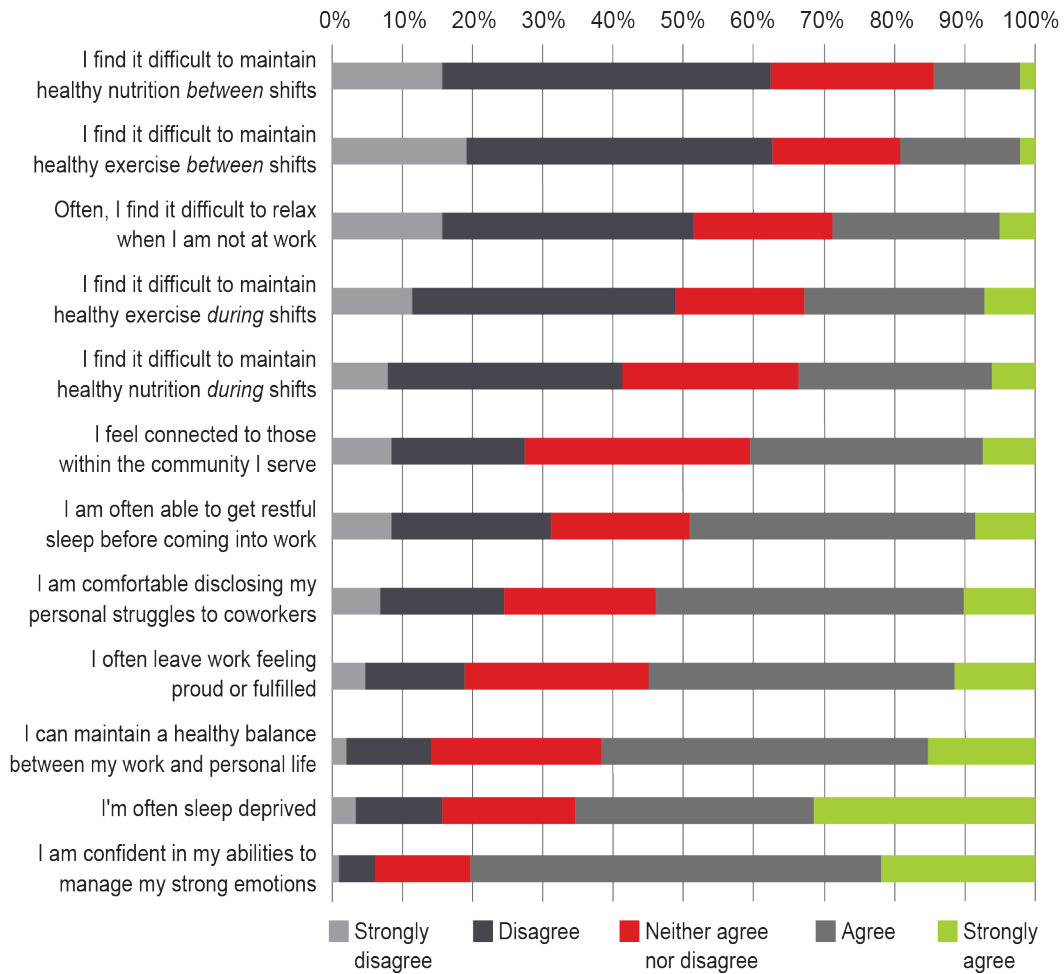
There was also an open-ended *other* option, where respondents could type in other factors they identified as impacting firefighter retention. The factors they identified were:

- 1. Management and culture:** These responses asked for more competent leadership; leadership and administration who actually care for employees; improvements to the culture within the department; better peer support; and increased morale.
- 2. Abuse of the 911 system:** These responses conveyed frustration with the public abusing the system for non-emergency situations. Non-emergent calls increase workload for crews and decrease their morale. Some responses included solutions such as educating the public on proper use of 911, or even penalties for 911 system abuse.
- 3. Work-life balance:** These responses called for more attention to firefighters' quality of life and how their work impacts that quality. Examples included reduced call loads, changes to scheduling, increased sleep, increased staffing to reduce burden on existing employees, livable wages, better job security, and an improved retirement package.

### Well-being and Job Task Satisfaction

The survey asked respondents to assess their own well-being on multiple dimensions. The majority (80%) of the respondents felt confident in their ability to manage strong emotions. Sixty percent of the respondents reported they are often sleep-deprived. More than half reported that they are *comfortable disclosing my personal struggles to co-workers, often leave work feeling proud or fulfilled, and can maintain a healthy balance between my work and personal life.*

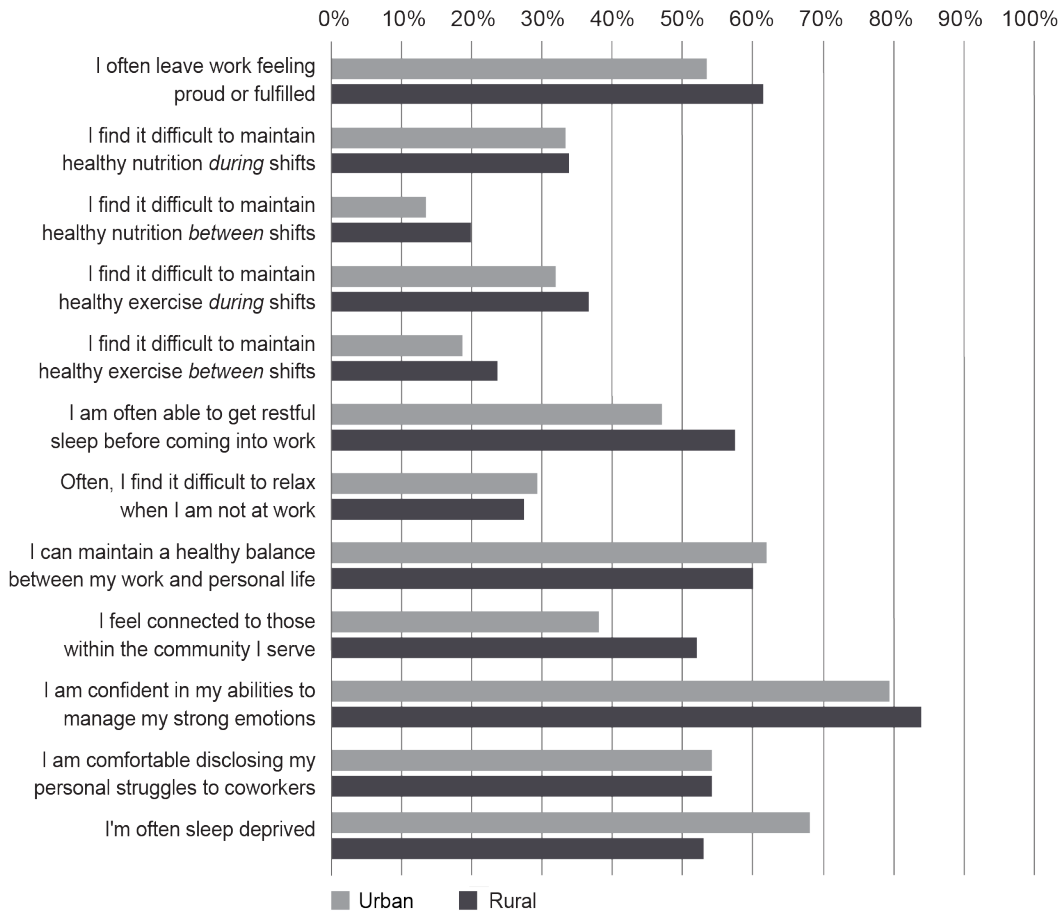
**Figure 24. Feelings about day-to-day job experience<sup>xiv</sup>**



xiv N=1714 for I find it difficult to maintain healthy nutrition between shifts; N=1713 for I find it difficult to maintain healthy exercise between shifts, and Often, I find it difficult to relax when I am not at work; N=1715 for I find it difficult to maintain healthy exercise during shifts; N=1716 for I find it difficult to maintain healthy nutrition during shifts; N=1710 for I feel connected to those within the community I serve, I'm often sleep deprived, and I often leave work feeling proud or fulfilled; N=1712 for I am often able to get restful sleep before coming into work; N=1708 for I am comfortable disclosing my personal struggles to co-workers; N=1712 for I can maintain a healthy balance between my work and personal life; N=1710 for I am confident in my abilities to manage my strong emotions.

We compared responses to questions about job experience and well-being between urban and rural respondents. For items that had greater agreement than disagreement for both rural and urban participants, rural respondents were more likely to agree *I am confident in my abilities to manage my strong emotions* and *I often leave work feeling proud or fulfilled*. More urban respondents than rural indicated they were *often sleep deprived*. For items where there were significant differences between urban and rural, 52% of rural respondents agree *I feel connected to those within the community I serve* and 57% agree *I am often able to get restful sleep before coming into work*. Less than 50% of urban respondents, however, agreed with the same statements (Figure 25).

**Figure 25. Feelings about day-to-day job experience by urban and rural**



**Preferences for Certain Job Tasks**

We asked the respondents to rate the parts of their job that bring them the most to least satisfaction. The rating for all respondents is shown in Table 5. We also analyzed the question by urban and rural respondent. Urban respondents showed the same ratings as the sample overall. Rural respondents were also similar, although they rated EMS as the second most satisfying part of their job and training as the third.

**Table 5. Rating of job task preference**

Rating	Job functions
1	Working on fire grounds
2	Training
3	EMS
4	Technical rescue
5	Community engagement (e.g. public education, smoke detector/car seat installation)
6	Hazardous materials

## Methodology

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The research team at NAU designed the firefighter retention survey to understand the state of firefighter employment in Arizona, with particular attention to retention factors and job satisfaction. We designed the survey in May 2023, and sent out the draft survey to the fire department/district administrators of four jurisdictions as a pilot. After a subsequent meeting with each of the four jurisdictions, we incorporated their feedback and finalized the survey. The survey was launched at the end of July 2023, and we gave the respondents a five-week window to fill out the survey.

The survey collected 1850 valid responses. According to the latest PSPRS record, as of June 30, 2023, there were 7446 active firefighters in the state. That gave us a sample size that is 24.8% of the total population, which is well above industry standards for this type of survey. Those responses are from 63 fire departments/districts in 13 out of the 15 counties in Arizona. In order to compare the responses of different demographic groups, we collected the respondent's profile data, including the jurisdiction, length of work as a firefighter, rank/position, age, gender, ethnicity, and race. We also added the urban/rural subgroups, to explore the different preferences and perceptions towards the job. In this study, urban areas are defined as the Phoenix Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and Tucson MSA, which include Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties. We categorized other MSAs, e.g., Prescott Valley-Prescott MSA, Yuma MSA, and Flagstaff MSA, as rural areas. That is based on the common perception of those regions in terms of firefighter job characteristics. The retention landscape in the fire departments/districts in those smaller municipalities and the unincorporated areas in those rural counties may be different from their urban peers.

## Appendix 1: Arizona Firefighter Retention Survey

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By submitting this survey, I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and agree that the information may be used in the research project described above. I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a Qualtrics Survey.

I agree     I do not agree

**In which jurisdiction/department do you currently work?**

[open-ended]

**For how long have you been working as a firefighter in your current jurisdiction/department?**

Under 1 year     1 - 5 years     5 - 10 years     10 - 15 years     15 - 20 years     20 - 25 years     Over 25 years

**For how long have you been working as a full-time firefighter anywhere in Arizona?**

Under 1 year     1 - 5 years     5 - 10 years     10 - 15 years     15 - 20 years     20 - 25 years     Over 25 years

**Do you plan to stay in the fire service in Arizona until you are eligible for full pension benefits?**

(Tier 1 & 2=20 years; Tier 3=25 years of total service)

Yes     No     I will stay until I'm eligible for minimum pension

**What is your current rank/position in your department/jurisdiction?**

Firefighter     Engineer     Company Officer     Other (please specify):

**What is your age?**

21 and under     22 - 25     26 - 30     31 - 35     36 - 40     41 - 45     46 - 50     51 - 55  
 56 - 60     61 - 65     66 and above

**What is your gender?**

Man     Woman     Transgender Man     Transgender Woman     Non-Binary     Other (please specify):

Prefer not to say

**Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?**

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin  
 Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano  
 Yes, Puerto Rican  
 Yes, Cuban  
 Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin (please specify):  
 Prefer Not to Say

**What is your race? (select all that apply)**

American Indian or Alaska Native  
 Asian  
 Black or African American  
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
 White  
 Other (please specify):  
 Prefer not to say



**How satisfied are you with the following monetary and non-monetary benefits that you receive?**

	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Not provided but would like it to be	I don't know what this is / not applicable
Annual base salary					
Overtime pay					
Assignment pay					
Paid family leave					
Paid sick leave					
Ability to accrue unused sick leave					
Opportunities for promotion					
Departmental awards and recognition					
Pension and other retirement benefits					
College tuition reimbursement					
Employee assistance programs					

**Please rate the extent to which each of the following motivates you to continue working as a firefighter:**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Sense of purpose in helping others					
Public appreciation					
Challenging and exciting work					
Job security					
Good pay and benefits					
Sense of comradery with colleagues					
Opportunity for career advancement					
It's my identity					

**Which of the following schedules is the closest to your typical work schedule?**

- One on, two off     Three every other on, four off     48 on, 96 off     Other (please specify):

**Which of the following schedules do you most prefer?**

- One on, two off     Three every other on, four off     48 on, 96 off     Other (please specify):

**In your current department/district, at your currently assigned station, what is your average call volume per 24-hour time increment?**

- 0-5     6-10     11-15     16+

**Is your call volume...**

- More than you would like     Less than you would like     About right

Please rate the extent to which you think each of the following contributes to firefighter turnover.

	Not a contributing factor	Moderately a contributing factor	Strong contributing factor	Extremely strong contributing factor
Pay and benefits				
Mental demands and stress				
Physical job demands				
Medical or chemical exposure				
Opportunities for career advancement				
Working conditions or equipment				
Support from management				
Long or irregular work hours				
Impact on family life				
Sleep deprivation				
Unmatched expectation and job duties				

Have you ever considered leaving your current firefighting position? If so, what were the reasons?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Yes, due to job dissatisfaction					
Yes, due to personal reasons (e.g. relocation, family commitments)					
Yes, due to mandatory overtime					
No, I have never considered leaving my current position					

How likely is it that you will still be working as a firefighter in Arizona in the future?

	Extremely likely	Somewhat likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Extremely unlikely	I will be retired then
6 months from now						
1 year from now						
2 years from now						
5 years from now						
10 years from now						
15 years from now						
20 years from now						
30 years from now						

If you were to leave your current position, how likely would you be to pursue each of the following alternative career paths?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very Likely
Stay in fire service, same jurisdiction, different rank					
Stay in fire service, same jurisdiction, different non-PSPRS position					
Stay in fire service, different jurisdiction, same position					
Stay in fire service, different jurisdiction, different position					
Outside of the fire service					
Retirement					

Have any of your co-workers left the agency in the last 6 months (not counting retirement)?

- Yes     No     Don't know/Prefer not to say

Did you previously work for a different fire department/district before working in your current position?

- Yes     No     Prefer not to say

Why did you leave that previous fire department/district? (Select all that apply.)

- Seeking increase in pay     Seeking increase in benefits     Seeking department with better morale  
 Seeking better work-life balance     Prefer not to say     Other reason (please specify):

Over the last year, how satisfied have you been with the following aspects of your day- to-day job experience?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I often leave work feeling proud or fulfilled.					
I find it difficult to maintain healthy nutrition during shifts.					
I find it difficult to maintain healthy nutrition between shifts.					
I find it difficult to maintain healthy exercise during shifts.					
I find it difficult to maintain healthy exercise between shifts.					
I am often able to get restful sleep before coming into work.					
Often, I find it difficult to relax when I am not at work.					
I can maintain a healthy balance between my work and personal life					
I feel connected to those within the community I serve.					
I am confident in my abilities to manage my strong emotions.					
I am comfortable disclosing my personal struggles to co-workers.					
I'm often sleep deprived.					

**Please rate (by click and drag) from most satisfaction (1, on top) to least satisfaction (6, on bottom): which of the following parts of your job bring you the most to least satisfaction?**

- Training
- EMS
- Working on fire grounds
- Technical Rescue
- Hazardous Materials
- Community engagement (e.g, public education, smoke detector/car seat installation)

**Please rate (by click and drag) the importance of items you think would impact retention of firefighter personnel: 1 being the most important reason and 7 being the least important reason.**

- Offer better pay and benefits
- Provide more opportunities for career advancement
- Improve working conditions or equipment
- Offer more training and development opportunities
- Improve communication and feedback
- Member driven input on department decisions
- Other (please specify):

**Please summarize what you enjoy about your job.**

[open-ended]

**Please summarize what you do not enjoy about your job.**

[open-ended]

**What would you suggest your organization do to better retain firefighters?**

[open-ended]

*Thank you for taking part in our research study!*

## End Notes

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- 1 “Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS),” State of Arizona Research Libraries, Arizona Secretary of State, August 30, 2020, [https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency\\_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs](https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs).
- 2 “Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS),” State of Arizona Research Libraries, Arizona Secretary of State, August 30, 2020, [https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency\\_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs](https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs).
- 3 “Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS),” State of Arizona Research Libraries, Arizona Secretary of State, August 30, 2020, [https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency\\_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs](https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs).
- 4 “Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS),” State of Arizona Research Libraries, Arizona Secretary of State, August 30, 2020, [https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency\\_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs](https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs).
- 5 “Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS),” State of Arizona Research Libraries, Arizona Secretary of State, August 30, 2020, [https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency\\_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs](https://azlibrary.gov/sla/agency_histories/public-safety-personnel-retirement-system-psprs).

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ARIZONA'S  
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRE SERVICE PERSONNEL

**Arizona Fire Service**  
**Retention Survey**



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