Aldermen want 'line of duty' designation for fallen city workers

Would expand definitions to reflect pandemic hazard

From staff reports

Five Southwest Side aldermen are proposing an ordinance to make certain that first responders who pass away from COVID-19 causes will be considered as fallen in the line of duty.

"First responders are on the front lines battling an enemy that has already claimed thousands of lives," said 14th Ward Ald. Edward M. Burke. "As members of the City Council, we have a moral obligation to support the loved ones of these heroes who have fallen in this fight against COVID-19."

The proposed ordinance, drafted with input from the representatives from the Fraternal Order of Police and Local 2 Firefighters, states the city will categorize any death of a first responder from COVID-19 to be "in the line of duty." Recipients of line of duty death benefits receive the responder's annual salary for a year from the time of death, and pending approval of the City Council, the spouse and any children under 26 would get health care benefits.


Lopez


Tabares


Quinn


Burke

"First responders put their lives on the line every day, but the COVID-19 pandemic has added even more stress and uncertainty," said 13th Ward Ald. Marty Quinn. "This ordinance will help to honor the fallen and help the families who have lost their loved one."

"There should be no question that if a first responder falls to COVID-19 that his or her family deserves the recognition and support from the city," added 23rd Ward Ald. Silvana Tabares. "If we can pass an ordinance and ease some uncertainty for the heroes who are fighting on the front lines to keep us safe and healthy, we need to do it now."

Also part of the effort are 18th Ward Ald. Derrick Curtis and 19th Ward Ald. Matt O'Shea.

Chicago Police officers who pass away in the line of duty are also entitled to a full honors funeral.

Expand it, Lopez says

Fifteenth Ward Ald. Raymond Lopez then said that he would introduce an ordinance that would amend the Chicago Municipal Code to create the Essential Municipal Employees' Death Benefit Fund. The purpose of the fund would be to support families of city employees who have died as a result of their needed, continued work "during any current, continuing or future crisis, regardless if it is a natural or man-made phenomenon."

According to Lopez, "Currently, the only line-of-duty benefit fund established is for police officers and firemen. While we acknowledge their role as first responders in a crisis, we must also acknowledge the thousands of other city workers that put their lives on the live working as essential employees."

Lopez's proposal would require an initial payment $1,000,000 into the fund. More dollars can be added or reduced per the annual budget appropriation ordinance.

Similar to the Policemen's and Firemen's Death Benefit Fund, the Essential Employees Fund would provide cash awards to the surviving spouse and/or children if the employee's death was a result of their needed services working within an "essential department" during the current COVID-19 global pandemic, any future natural disaster or any future manmade phenomenon, such a terrorist attack.

"It is important that our employees know we have their back during times of crisis," Lopez said, "especially when we are asking them to put their safety & well-being on the line in order to keep Chicago moving forward."

If enacted, Lopez's proposal would provide these specific benefits:

- $8,000 for funeral expenses.
- as much as $40,000 to a surviving spouse with minor child/children.