

Feds investigating disabled Chicago firefighters, paramedics in wake of Sun-Times' reports

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A federal grand jury that's investigating disability payments to Chicago police officers in the wake of a Chicago Sun-Times investigation is also probing injury claims from Chicago firefighters and paramedics, newly obtained records show.

As it did with the police pension fund, the grand jury is demanding that the firefighters pension fund produce a host of records, including medical reports, dating to January 2006, according to the subpoena the fund's administrators received last week.

Firemen's Annuity & Benefit Fund of Chicago officials did not respond Thursday to a call seeking comment on the subpoena, which gives them until Oct. 23 to give the grand jury copies of all:

- ◆ Injury reports, including the names of the firefighters and paramedics, a description of their injuries and names of the doctors who have treated them.
- ◆ Doctors' reports and bills.
- ◆ Records prepared by any investigators who have monitored the disabled firefighters and paramedics.
- ◆ Records showing whether the disabled firefighters and paramedics were offered other employment with the city of Chicago.

The subpoena follows a series of reports in the Sun-Times, beginning in July, that have exposed a fire and police disability system in Chicago that does little to get those who are hurt back on the job. The stories — which also have prompted a City Hall crackdown and the suspension of disability payments to one police officer — documented cases in which firefighters and paramedics injured on the job continued to get disability checks after

moving on to other jobs outside city government, including one now working as a fire inspector and another as a nurse.

The fire department doesn't have any program in place to provide limited-duty jobs to injured firefighters and paramedics, though the police department does and has 347 officers in such posts.

The city has 390 firefighters and paramedics on disability. Altogether, they get a total of more than \$27 million a year in disability payments from the firefighters pension fund, which, like other city pension plans, is largely supported by property taxes and is facing an increasingly tough financial situation.