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## The Drug and Alcohol Testing Bill That Wasn't

*New firefighters' contract should include operational changes in several areas*

Since last August when drug and alcohol testing was pushed to the forefront in contract talks between the Menino Administration and firefighters' union (Local 718), the Research Bureau has argued that annual drug and alcohol testing should be a statewide requirement for all uniformed public safety employees and not be subject to collective bargaining. That position seemed to get some traction when a docket was filed in the Legislature requiring drug and alcohol testing but the filing appears to be as far as the bill will go.

In early April, Representative Christopher Donelan (D-Orange) filed a docket that would require all Massachusetts public safety personnel to submit to random drug and alcohol testing. [a docket is a precursor to a written bill] This requirement would apply to police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians. The filing received media coverage and editorial support. However, the filing was submitted at the request of a constituent and no bill has been drafted according to Donelan's office.

Local 718 has publicly stated that it is willing to negotiate drug testing in a new contract. That point was reinforced by the union member on the state Joint Labor-Management Committee who has insisted that random mandatory drug and alcohol testing should not be included in arbitration proceedings and instead be negotiated

between Local 718 and the Administration. The union does not want arbitration to become the vehicle for municipalities to achieve drug testing and believes negotiating drug testing with the Mayor will produce a more favorable salary agreement in return.

Over the past seven years, the fiscal climate for Boston has tightened dramatically requiring the City to become more efficient in service delivery. Yet during this time, there have been no language changes in the firefighters' contract. The 2004 contract, settled through an arbitrator's decision, involved only increases in salary and paid detail hourly rates. That is why it is so important that this new contract include management reform language addressing issues such as shift swapping, acting out of grade, sick leave, vehicle maintenance civilianization, modified (light) duty and health insurance reform in addition to drug and alcohol testing.

Bringing the contract to arbitration will limit the issues addressed, which is why settling this dispute through mediation is in the best interest of both the City and firefighters. The recent Boston Police Patrolmen Association's contract that included significant language changes with a salary increase of 14% over four years is the standard that should be followed for the contract with Local 718.