

Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs



Recruitment and Retention Incentives

for

Volunteer Emergency Responders

presented to

PA House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness

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Edward C. Troxell,

PSAB Director of Government Affairs

800-232-7722 x1021 - - - Fax 717-236-8289

www.boroughs.org

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Public Hearing on Recruitment and Retention Incentives for Volunteer Emergency Responders

Good Morning members of the House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share with you this morning the various perspectives that the Pa State Association of Boroughs (PSAB) maintains as it seeks to support, encourage and foster membership & retention in the volunteer fire & emergency services. My name is Ed Troxell, and I serve as the Director of Government Affairs for the PSAB. Since 1911, our association has been the recognized voice for boroughs here in Harrisburg as well as DC.

Today the purpose of our hearing is to explore recruitment and retention (R&R) incentives for our volunteer emergency responders. PSAB is more than able to discuss the various incentives that have been offered over the years to foster volunteerism in the fire & emergency services world. Beginning with legislative proposals, being the primary purpose of this committee; ranging from tax exemptions, grant programs and service benefits, there is no shortage of offerings. PSAB generally endorses measures which provide true and realistic support for the emergency services community. I will address a few of those measures later in this testimony.

Perspectives

However, instead of putting our “stamp of approval” to any one proposal today, PSAB would encourage Legislators to step back from the tendency to pass a bill, which may result in unintended consequences; the committee has experienced that before. Additionally, PSAB believes the issue of recruiting and retaining EMS volunteers is not one of passing a law and declaring problem solved. Frankly, recruiting and retaining fire and EMS personnel is really only *addressed and never truly solved*. State, County & Municipal officials do well in cultivating a respect and understanding for those serving as volunteers! A continuing dialogue must be fostered among officials and service providers, depending on the legislative process for solutions is not always as dynamic as demands.

Boroughs, by their very nature, have supported fire & emergency service providers through various methods. Many elected borough officials are current firefighters or serve or have served their fire departments in one capacity or another. Boroughs have further supported their volunteer fire associations as well. Throughout, we have found recruiting and retaining membership in borough

fire/EMS services to be in need of constant awareness and diligence. It is essential to engage fire/EMS personnel to learn of staffing and response needs. A committed management and administrative awareness of need are what help to build robust R&R programs and that's what boroughs pursue.

Interaction & Observations

Fire and EMS personnel deserve appropriate support in their recruitment and retention efforts. This support is best served by observing how the Service recruits and retains its members. There is a need to understand how firefighters respond to call-outs, obtain their necessary apparatus & turn-out gear, communicate during incidents and file close out reports. Observing the strains of the fire/EMS service enables municipalities to know how to support their individual fire departments and EMS services. What Fire Companies in Berks County need to attract new volunteers and retain experienced personnel differs from the Fire Departments in Indiana County. This is not to mention each municipality within those counties!

Furthermore in support of R&R, existing fire/EMS personnel must be confident of the support of the communities they serve. They find among the most support they receive is that of apparatus and equipment. These large scale expenditures demonstrate a municipality's willingness to commit to the fire/EMS services. They also encourage residents to consider participation and commitment to the fire/EMS service. Often, nothing says more to the residents of a borough than the formal ceremony surrounding a housing of a new piece of apparatus!

Strategies promoting Recruitment & Retention

Overall, the committee has requested this hearing to focus on the recruiting and retention needs of volunteer fire & EMS. Particularly committee members are eager to learn whether the PSAB sees the value of distinct legislative proposals, which will be addressed. Yet there is an overall mindset if you will, to incent volunteerism. It's based on commitment, courtesy and respect for those who run into a burning building when it is our natural inclination to run away. It is holding a conversation based on mutual respect and understanding for the needs of both municipal government & the fire/EMS services. It is inviting the service into the decision making process, as well as the service understanding the context wherein they serve. PSAB stresses to its membership to do just this, while there are those whom may lack in this practice, the association will constantly reinforce this approach.

Regarding the legislative incentives which PSAB would prefer to be pursued in one form or another, the following is a brief review of the list provided to us by committee staff:

HB 2001- (P) Barrar

Amends Section 2116 of Act 284 of 1921, known as The Insurance Company Law, requiring managed care plans to pay Emergency Medical Services (EMS) claims for services performed as a result of a 911 emergency call and when no transport of the patient takes place. **Status:** Pending Action House Insurance, PSAB supports *(Resolution)

Bill Out for Co- Sponsor- (P) Barrar

The bill that is out for co-sponsor will authorize volunteer fire companies to recuperate any real and reasonable costs associated with an emergency response by billing the individual involved in the emergency. **Status:** pending introduction, PSAB supports*

HB 171- (P) Burns

An Act establishing a recruitment scholarship program for volunteer fire companies, volunteer ambulance services and volunteer rescue squads; providing for duties of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency; and making an appropriation. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB neutral.

HB 253- (P) B. Boyle

An Act amending the act of June 24, 1976 (P.L.424, No.101), referred to as the Emergency and Law Enforcement Personnel Death Benefits Act, amending the title of the act; further providing for authority for payment; adding a definition of "natural gas responder"; and further providing for construction of act. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB neutral.

HB 352- (P) Reed

An Act amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in Commonwealth services, providing for volunteer emergency response personnel. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB neutral.

HB379- (P) Goodman

An Act amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, providing for incentives for municipal volunteers of fire companies and emergency medical services agencies. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB neutral.

HB535- (P) Kortz

An Act amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, providing for incentives for municipal volunteers of fire companies and emergency medical services agencies and volunteers of hazardous materials response teams. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB neutral.

HB 635- (P) Davis

An Act amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, further providing for assistance to volunteer fire companies, ambulance service and rescue squads. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB neutral.

HB 754- (P) Swanger

An Act amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, providing for the Volunteer Quick Response Services Grant Program. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB Supports.

HB 1038- (P) Sturla

An Act establishing a grant program for municipal fire and emergency services organizations; and providing for grant funding. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB Supports.

HB 1632- (P) Knowles

Amends Title 35 (Health and Safety) to authorize a tax credit for private sector employers which allow employees who are volunteer first responders to leave work to respond to an emergency or to attend training; and to provide employment protections for such responders in both the private and public sectors. **Status:** Passed House, pending action in Senate Finance, PSAB supports.

HB 1383- (P) Hanna

An Act providing for reimbursement to certain emergency services providers of the cost of responding to a request for emergency services on certain State-owned lands. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB Supports.

HB 1926- (P) White

An Act providing for a waiver of tuition and other fees for children of certain volunteer firefighters at community colleges and State-owned institutions of higher education and for additional powers and duties of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency. **Status:** Pending Action House VA&EP, PSAB Supports.