

**TESTIMONY TO THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS
& EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE
AND THE
MAJORITY POLICY COMMITTEE
ADAMS COUNTY FIRE TRAINING CENTER,
GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
OCTOBER 25, 2013**

By William F. Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFO, CTO, FIFE

Members of the Committee, Fellow Fire Service Officials, Elected Officials, and Guests, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning on the issues facing Pennsylvania's Fire and Emergency Service Community. While I could speak to issues of codes, finance, apparatus costs, or local political conflict, I would prefer to spend my time addressing the issue of recruiting and retaining members of Pennsylvania's Fire and Emergency Service Community.

In 2012, the Firemen's Association of the State of Pennsylvania (FASP) was awarded a FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response) Grant to develop a "Strategic Plan for Recruitment and Retention" for its Fire and Emergency Medical Service Community. The project provides a methodology and a variety of tools to facilitate the implementation of that plan. The Project was completed by the VFIS Education, Training and Consulting team, and involved over twenty Pennsylvania subject matter experts in the compilation of research data and the development of the report. I served as the Project Director for this initiative.

Following an extensive data gathering process the information received was analyzed and a comprehensive Strategic Plan adopted. A summary chart of successful initiatives was developed, but it was evident that not all programs work in all areas – recruitment and retention is a local issue and leadership is a critical component. Education of departmental leadership is necessary, as is support to recruitment and retention programs.

Pennsylvania's status regarding emergency service recruitment and retention was not dissimilar to the national situation. There are local and regional successes and failures which necessitated the development of a "cafeteria approach" to tools and programs for use in recruiting and retaining Fire/EMS personnel in Pennsylvania.

This report identified numerous recruitment and retention programs for consideration by FASP to develop for statewide application, but recognize local initiatives will not include all such programs, but only the ones deemed appropriate. The objectives of the project were achieved through the delivery of the project deliverables. This final submitted strategic plan to recruit and retain fire and emergency medical personnel within the State of Pennsylvania will only be as successful as the leadership that is involved and actual plan implementation is fulfilled.

Fires, rescues, hazardous materials incidents and emergency medical incidents require people to perform the necessary tasks to protect lives and property. Whether volunteer, part-paid, or career, people perform the tasks, not equipment, not elected officials, not equipment vendors. Without firefighters and medical responders, the job doesn't get done. However, we continue to rely on a system designed in a totally different political and economic environment, to work today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I submit to you that the fire and EMS system in place today is NOT our grandfather's fire and EMS system or our father's system. The 21st century is demanding a revisiting of how fire and emergency medicine is to be provided.

That being the case, it is important to understand why people join fire and EMS agencies today.

The study indicated these reasons as:

- Help the community
- Have a social outlet with friends and relatives
- Learn a skill or trade and possibly obtain a job
- Personal interest

It is also important to understand why people leave fire and EMS agencies today.

- Leadership or local politics
- No time to continue to participate
- Too much time spent fundraising
- Too much required training

Finally, it is important to understand what people want as incentives to participate in fire and EMS agencies. These were found to vary by age range. Younger members wanted a more immediate value relationship – e.g. cash per call, cash stipends; while longer term members were looking for service recognition, logo wear, etc.

In summary, there are four main issues about recruiting and retaining fire and EMS personnel that the report and the project are addressing

1. Recruitment and Retention is a local issue – what works in one community may not work in the neighboring community
2. Recruitment is Marketing and you must market all the time
3. It is important to know what personnel want as incentives, before they become issues
4. Leadership is critical to sustaining effective organizations.

The entire report is provided as part of my testimony. It is important to advise you of the issues affecting the fire and EMS system Pennsylvania and the fact that nothing has really changed in ten years.

The Senate Resolution 60 Report of 2004 indicated twenty-three (23) recommendations for action to help sustain the system in Pennsylvania. To date, only the few “easy to implement”, minimal cost recommendations have been addressed. Many of the key recommendations, which cost money or political capital to implement or change paradigms were not implemented and have cost us in time and performance.

Maybe we need to look at neighboring states and how they have addressed similar issues. For example

- New York has a state retirement and nursing home for firefighters
- Delaware offers a pension program
- West Virginia and North Carolina have less restrictive, yet very effective performance based training system for volunteers
- New York has a state wide credit union for fire and EMS personnel
- Consolidations work, as do fire/EMS authorities and districts, but need incentives and political direction to be successful
- In our own state, Allegheny County Community College has a special program for firefighters attending the college – why don’t other community colleges in Pennsylvania have the same program in place?

Solutions exist, but we have to have the political will to suggest and drive unpopular changes that will make public safety at reasonable cost available to all of Pennsylvania. This starts with NOT thinking like our grandfathers who led small limited activity agencies, but thinking like 21st century businessmen who have to operate on a budget and have flexibility in service delivery.

Again I suggest to you, this is not our grandfather’s fire and EMS department today, yet we continue to try and fund it and direct it, as if we are living in the golden years after World War II. Someone has to start taking action or the people of Pennsylvania will be the losers.

So what can we do that is reasonable and practical to sustain volunteerism in the emergency services, to recruit and retain qualified personnel for our volunteer and career systems, while providing a level of service commensurate with the needs of the community.

You can start by taking a hard look at the Senate Resolution 60 recommendations not acted on, and take a leadership role in implementing them, to make a difference and find a way to make them a reality.

These include:

1. Determine the expectation of service delivery
2. Restructure Act 84
3. Allow tax credits to businesses allowing fire/EMS personnel to respond to emergencies
4. Allow tax credits to volunteer fire and EMS personnel
5. Enable local fire/EMS Districts or Authorities
6. Establish a tuition credit program for students who are volunteer responders
7. Establish/permit service longevity programs
8. Authorize local public safety service fees
9. Allow volunteer fire/EMS members to contribute to and benefit from state health insurance programs
10. Allow for billing for incidents occurring on non-local highways
11. Permit direct reimbursement to Fire and EMS agencies by insurers.

These are mainstays of issues found in the recent Pennsylvania Recruitment and Retention study as well as:

1. Changing the training system to one that is more risk/local focused. This is not to say training is not important. In fact, as current research has found that fires are burning hotter, faster and are more impacting, it is important to make sure we are properly trained to do the job. The study seems to indicate the delivery method is more the issue than content. Thus more funding may be required to truly make the training system meet the changing needs of new “workforce”.
2. Finding ways to reduce the fundraising burdens of volunteers
3. Support leadership development to make our leaders more aware of their member/employees, issues facing them, and how to effectively work with them.

4. Create incentives for realistic mergers, consolidations, as well as the development of fire/EMS authorities or districts
5. Enable funding for benefit programs to assist members incenting them to join instead of doing other activities to achieve similar benefits; possibly creating a system that pays for training.

As mentioned earlier, there are success stories throughout the United States, let's not ignore success because others have found it, let's take those success stories, enhance them, and apply them to make Pennsylvania a safer place to live, work, and recreate.

William F. Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFO, CTO, FIFE, has over 40 years of service in the Pennsylvania Fire and EMS Community as the former Fire Chief and Fire Marshal in East Bethlehem Township, Washington County, Pennsylvania and Fire Chief & President of the King of Prussia Volunteer Fire Company, and Township Supervisor in King of Prussia, Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Bill served as the Chair of the Pennsylvania Senate Resolution 60 Commission, is an Adjunct Professor in the Graduate School of Public Safety and Environmental Protection at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia; is President of the Board of Directors of the Congressional Fire Services Institute, and is employed as the Vice President of Education, Training and Consulting for VFIS, the country's largest provider of risk management and insurance to the emergency services community.

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