

CITY OF WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA

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Testimony – The Challenges of Career Fire Departments

Good evening Senators, House Members and fellow fire fighters;

My name is Jay Delaney and I am Fire Chief in the City of Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania and Vice President of the Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony this evening regarding “The Challenges Facing Career Fire Departments Today”.

Today’s modern fire fighter has far more required training and responds to much more than fires in many career fire departments regardless of size. This past year in the City of Wilkes-Barre 85% of the 11,411 responses were not fire related but emergency service related. In many career fire departments our fire fighting staff handles Emergency Medical Service, Hazardous Materials Response, Water Rescue, High Angle Rope/Confined Space/Trench Rescue Operations along with Basic Motor Vehicle Rescue and many service related calls. Yes, we still respond to fires that burn hotter than ever due to the complex make up of building contents.

Our staff must complete training in Blood Borne pathogens and Emergency Vehicle Operations as well as numerous non fire related emergency management education and techniques.

Next I will discuss fire fighting education. I can tell you twenty five years ago a career fire fighter was hired, given a 30 day orientation along with fire apparatus driver training, and they were placed on a shift to learn with on-the-job training and very little cost.

Today a fire fighter hired in most career departments has municipal mandated training/education of Essentials of Fire fighting, Fire Fighter 1,

Fighter 2, HazMat Awareness and Operations, Vehicle Rescue (PA Department of Health), Incident Command, Emergency Medical Technician Certification and Emergency Vehicle Operator Course.

This training takes twelve weeks to complete with 480 to 720 hours of classroom training.

We are living in a post 9/11 era and all Fire Fighters are emergency responders and need to be trained on all response disciplines, not just fire fighting. The public demands trained, qualified emergency response personnel. The costs projected for this emergency response training is about \$15,000.00 in salary and \$6500.00 per student for the training/education or about \$21,500.00 per fire fighter total and in some cases is much higher. Our budgets cannot continue to absorb all the additional requirements placed on today's fire fighters. Currently all police officer training is covered under Act 120.

If today's fire departments are to be prepared and positioned for an all hazards response we will need a vision for enhanced financing to offer our fire fighters the best training with the best equipment possible. Fire fighters are being asked to provide additional all hazards response capability than ever before yet there is little funding for this training.

The cost of modern emergency response equipment is extremely expensive. An ambulance costs about \$225,000.00, Fire Engine over \$500,000.00 and Aerial Ladder Truck over \$1,000,000.00. Fire equipment is critical infrastructure in keeping our communities safe. Three years ago the State's Volunteer Loan Assistance Program had about \$75,000,000.00. At that time the Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association had consulted the State Fire Commissioners Office for inclusion of career fire departments to the VLAP. Career Fire Departments are currently excluded from VLAP because both the referendum authorizing the sale of the VLAP bonds and the bond indenture said volunteers. Two years ago \$30,000,000.00 was removed from the VLAP program despite the fact that there is a greater demand for equipment loans. This past year an additional \$9,000,000.00 was removed from the VLAP fund. The loss of these dollars sends a clear message to both career and volunteer fire departments. It is our understanding this fund may be broke in five to seven years. We respectfully request the VLAP program be adequately funded for both career and volunteer fire departments.

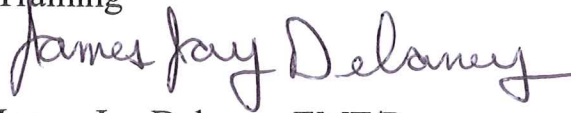
I would like to thank the entire legislature and Governor Wolf for the Fire Fighter Grant Program extension. This legislation was a huge boost to the Commonwealths emergency response capability. Now we must begin a comprehensive discussion to meet the training needs for the states emergency response community.

The three top issues facing today's career Fire/EMS service are:

Staffing

Equipment

Training

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Jay Delaney".

James Jay Delaney, EMT/P

Fire Chief – City of Wilkes-Barre

Vice President – Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association