

Testimony for the

Senate and House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee Joint Hearing on
the SR 6 Commission

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Chair, SR 6 Commission, Innovation Subcommittee

Key Topics:

- Municipal Support and Education Regarding Fire/EMS
- Community Risk Reduction
- Regional Technical Advisors
- Relief Associations
- Basic Firefighter/EMT Training Funding
- Financial Support to Employers to Release Employees for Fire/EMS Training
- Legislation to Facilitate Regional/County Fire Services

Discussion

1. **Municipal Support and Education Regarding Fire/EMS** – A primary topic of the Committee's discussion was on how to both encourage and educate local municipal governments on the support that they can provide to the local Fire/EMS agencies. It was the committee members' opinion that Fire/EMS agencies need additional support and many municipal governments were not well versed in their needs or how to provide them. Support can come in the areas of finance, administration, human resources, legal, and information technology, to name a few. While there are many different types of municipalities and governmental structures in the Commonwealth, it is believed that additional support can be provided to assist local governments with identifying the areas they can assist and support their Fire/EMS agencies.
ACTION ITEM – *For Emergency Services Organizations to utilize the SR-6 report as a **starting point** to communicate and educate their local governments on what support that they can provide and promote further discussion. SR-6 Committee to widely disseminate this report for that purpose.*
2. **Community Risk Reduction** – This is a very relevant topic that is being discussed at a national level to help shape the future of Fire/EMS. It works by taking a holistic view of the risks present at the local level and helping communities identify and prioritize these risks to reduce their occurrence and impact on the community. The United States Fire Administration, especially through the National Fire Academy, has made a significant investment into Community Risk Reduction and the committee felt consideration is appropriate to offering these types of programs at the State and Local levels in Pennsylvania. Through the intervention strategies of education, engineering, enforcement, emergency response, and economic incentives, Community Risk Reduction uses all available tools to help mitigate and prevent risks which can be a significant benefit to the Commonwealth in addressing the issues related to Fire/EMS.
ACTION ITEM – *Use the PennFIRS system to identify CRR trends, fire causes, near misses and have a system to allow fire depts. to report the same that may not go into PennFIRS. Use data to create 1 page "Coffee Break" trainings on topics that can be used for CRR training. May tie to #3 below.*
3. **Regional Technical Advisors** – One of the initiatives that was recommended as part of SR60 of 2003 was to find ways to enhance the State's services to our first responders. An early example of this in the preliminary discussions of SR6 was to provide regional technical advisors to serve as a resource for Fire/EMS agencies and local governments to help navigate the relevant programs and resources available, as well as to help them understand implementation of the legislation and laws that relate to Fire/EMS. This resource would be in closer proximity to the communities and allows for more direct

communications, and to provide an appropriate path to allow the Commonwealth to share information with both Fire/EMS agencies and local governments.

ACTION ITEM – *Use the NJ DFRS model (Virginia, New Mexico) to establish regional tech advisors working for the Commonwealth to assist with determining standards of cover, CRR issues, “certificates of need” and overall technical help. They could be assigned to DCED or the State Fire Academy/Fire Administrator’s office*

4. **Relief Associations** – While we know other task groups are discussing this more in depth, we believe that the need to maintain a separate non-profit entity from the fire company could be both costly and burdensome for many agencies. It was discussed that allowing the Relief Associations to be integrated into the existing fire companies could help the organizations to better streamline the process and administration, provided that necessary controls and procedures were in place.

ACTION ITEM – *Use an appropriate, small group to review the current administrative requirements for Relief Associations to evaluate the potential to reduce administrative burdens on those that need to manage that. Evaluate providing incentives to merge relief associations.*

5. **Basic Firefighting/EMS Training Funding** – One of the fundamental ways that the Commonwealth can assist counties, municipalities, and individual companies/ departments and help to establish a basic level of training for firefighters & EMTs statewide would be to provide state funding for all basic level fire training and EMT training across the Commonwealth. This could include initiatives to take as much of this training online as possible. We would propose that the Commonwealth offer funding for 1 consistent program, and county or local training agencies could opt-in or opt-out of this training as they see fit.

6. **Financial support to employers to release employees for Fire/EMS Training**

ACTION ITEM – *State government evaluate tax or other financial incentives to allow for employers to allow them to send employees to scheduled fire/EMS training much like they would do for National Guard employees.*

7. **Support for Regional/County Fire/EMS Services**

ACTION ITEM – *Develop legislation to facilitate/enable regional/county fire services. We need to set the stage for further development of combination services. Much of this has been or is under development in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The concept would be to provide a core of career personnel to handle the “routine” responses supported by volunteers to handle more involved responses.*

** Note that Bloomsburg University recently added volunteer fire/EMS service as a means to count towards their general education requirements – perhaps could be used as a model for other state universities <http://bloomsburgu.tumblr.com/post/174212646097/first-responder-service-to-now-count-for-general> This information was also passed along to the Recruitment and Retention Committee leadership

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