

Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute  
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Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Services Committee

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Testimony of Steven W. Bair, PFESI Board President

Thank you for presenting this opportunity to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 698. I am Steve Bair, Director and Chief of the Centre Region Fire Protection Program in State College, Board President of the Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute, and I represented PACOG throughout the development of the SR 6 report.

I started my fire service participation in Lower Paxton Township in 1975 with Colonial Park Fire Company, and I have served in my current fire service position in State College since February 2007. Through my role as a state fire/rescue instructor, a speaker on various fire service matters, and my involvement in various fire service-related projects around the state; I believe I have a thorough understanding of the challenges facing Pennsylvania fire and emergency medical service providers and the municipalities they serve.

Fire companies and emergency medical services are businesses that are expensive and that take a lot of time, effort, and knowledge to manage. At earlier hearings on Senate Bill 698 and other bills addressing fire and EMS, data has been presented showing the heavy toll financial and business management takes on the people managing these services. You have heard from organizations representing municipalities who, like emergency services, also struggle with a dearth of time and resources to manage their many challenges, and thus have little or no management assistance to offer local emergency service providers.

As of this month, the concept of allowing counties to assist municipal governments has been discussed for two years. In those two years Pennsylvania's fire and emergency medical systems have grown weaker throughout most of the Commonwealth. The present paradigm is failing, has been failing for quite some time, and will continue to fail. Piecemeal efforts to fine tune that paradigm, no matter how earnest, are ultimately doomed to fail as well. Senate Bill 698 offers a paradigm shift by adding a new management tool that could be very beneficial to many communities in Pennsylvania. The time to act is now.

Thank you for your supporting SB 698 and moving the bill forward.