

Testimony to the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee
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Member of the SR 6 Innovation Sub-Committee

Greetings members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic.

I have personal archive of Pennsylvania news articles dating from 2021 back to the late 1980's that outline the challenges of the fire service in the Commonwealth. The issues of having enough firefighters to adequately serve the community and respond and funding for operations and capital equipment has been the consistent theme. EMS began to struggle in the mid to late 90's with issues regarding adequate reimbursement and more recently with staffing. Thirty years of challenges. Over those 30 years, our organizations succeeded and failed. Those that recognized the environment and changed succeeded.

The core issues of the past continue today as they relate to the number of operational firefighters and adequate funding as cost of services continue to rise.

The 2018 SR 6 Innovation Subcommittee along with the Government Support Subcommittee conducted detailed discussions on ideas how to sustain and improve Pennsylvania's Fire & Emergency Services organizations. The committees fundamentally believed the Commonwealth's fire and EMS organizations needed new options to help organize and the county and regional level. This idea included statutes necessary to enable counties or other regional organizations to form countywide or regional organizations to improve and sustain emergency services.

Our fundamental organizational structures in Pennsylvania at times hamper implementing innovative solutions.

Currently, most legacy county and regional associations are fraternal in nature and although serve an important function, do little to coordinate the administrative and operational aspects of emergency response.

Countywide Public Safety Authorities organized under the Municipal Authorities Act could serve a vital function as it relates to modern recruitment of firefighters and EMT's and adequate financial support to address the cost of readiness.

A Countywide or regional approach to a fair funding formula can be accomplished by using a Countywide Public Safety Authority concept.

Our goal at the State level should be to provide innovative options for counties and municipalities to ensure the citizens receive emergency services. Senate Bill 698 is a good start and it will show we are doing something beyond the more of the same. I would like to sincerely thank Senators Baker and Kearney for champagning this effort and the members of the committee for considering SB 698.