

TESTIMONY

ON AUGUST 23, 2016

TO THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

&

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

COMMITTEE

LOCATION: MONROE COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY

TRAINING CENTER

GRANT PARSONS, LIEUTENANT

LOOKOUT FIRE COMPANY #1 OF PEN ARGYL

I would first like to thank the members of the Pennsylvania House and Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees for the opportunity to discuss current and future concerns involving our Pennsylvania emergency responders.

The future of volunteer fire and emergency service, as we are all aware, is a very dark future. Each year the number of volunteers continues to dwindle to lower and lower numbers, soon to the point where we here in the commonwealth will have an true emergency ourselves. Throughout history Pennsylvania has always been one of leaders across the nation for fire service and our amazing volunteer run departments. Thus this is way we need to take action and continue to work on ways to continue the rich history of volunteer service here in Pennsylvania. I myself know very well about this tradition, as I am a now fourth generation volunteer that has served our community. Therefore I believe it is necessary that we continue to explore new ways in recruiting and retaining volunteers, provide adequate funding, and new ways of providing the necessary training to a whole new generation to help ensure the future of volunteer emergency service here in the commonwealth..

Although in retrospect I have only been in the service short time compared to many other, I can say that for the area in which I have lived and grown up in the communities has and continue to change. Before, those that lived in the community grew up in the community and worked in the community and many were very involved in the community. Today individuals are working more, having to travel greater distances in order to find reliable jobs, and find time to be with their families and support them. Thus how can we expect someone to be able to commit to several months of training and dedication just to be involved with a volunteer organization? Then after telling them that they have to do 3 or 4 nights a week of training, you have to tell them that they need to come out and help at fundraisers, which for many communities provides the only events that bring their community together.

This is why we must continue to find ways to encourage community members to become active and get involved. So far we have been able to do this with SR 60 and finding ways to provide tax credits and other incentives, although we need to continue to research additional ways both at the state and local levels. Another avenue that we need to begin to look into is the recruitment of our next generation. Thus I believe that this committee should start to look into programs that targets middle school and high school students that gains their interest and then can provide them with the necessary training. A sample of something similar to consider basing it off of is that of the State Police Camp cadet program. Although, even though the camp cadet is a state run overnight camp. The program for emergency service would rather be a program that are run locally and can be as simple as a day camp.

As we continue to look at ways to retain individuals in the fire and emergency service, the hardest thing is getting the proper and necessary training. With the higher demands and requirements needed in training in today's emergency service community, we find it harder to not only get individuals the necessary training but also able to complete the typical long and

demanding training that in many cases is over 110 hours and spans 4 or 5 months. Furthermore certain programs are only offered once or twice a year and can depend on the number of individuals that sign up for the class weather the class will even happen. We need to find a way to have the necessary classes and training regularly available. One way this could be done is by offering courses through an online learning system. By creating an online learning system we would allow the next generation, along with current emergency responders the necessary content and training they need, while still having them having to participate and pass the necessary written and practical testing. I strongly believe this is something that needs to be done to secure the future of our emergency responders.

Since the creation of SR 60 we have seen a major steps and action taken in regards to the funding of emergency services. We have seen this in such ways of making sure that the state fire commissars office providing grants, additional allowances for the state run fire loan program, and allowing fire departments able to have access to costar program just to name a few. However funding still remains one of the toughest obstacles for departments throughout the commonwealth. I believe that this committee should begin to look into additional ways to help provide the necessary funds to help make sure our emergency services are able to stay current and provide the necessary service to the residents that they serve. I do wish to state that I must commend the hard work that has been done at the state level to make sure that this is happening. There for I believe that is time that we start to look into ways in which the local and county levels governments are held more responsible in assist and provide funding to the organizations that they have direct contact with. It is time that we take the full burden off of the state. As we all know the cost to operate and function are becoming harder and harder. This is best known and seen with the cost associated to purchase the necessary equipment, such as vehicles, Personal Protective equipment, construction of stations and commination equipment. We must find ways to make sure that more than anything else that we can get assistance from all levels of government before a heavy tax burden is laid on the residents due to the volunteer department now becoming a paid department.

As we know there are many things that we need to be doing in order to help protect and preserve the future of our volunteer emergency service in the commonwealth. Thus working together we will find the necessary ways to do so. That is why today I once again ask this committee to look into the ways to recruit and retain volunteers, provide on-line training, and have funding for departments come from all level of government from within the commonwealth. Although I believe that there are many other items which need to be addressed as well, these are the areas in which we need to pay the most attention too to help the future of emergency services in the commonwealth.

In closing, I truly believe that this is just a slight overview of the major items we need to address, and I look forward in see the progress of these items. I would like to thank everyone from the veteran's Affairs and Emergency preparedness committee for hearing my testimony today and taking the time, interest and effort on reviewing SR 60 and ensure the future of emergency services in our great commonwealth.