

Testimony for the

Senate and House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

SR 6 Commission

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Chair, SR 6 Commission Training & Operations Subcommittee

Location:

**Pennsylvania State Fire Academy
1150 Riverside Drive
Lewistown, PA 17044**

Co-Chairman Vulakovich, Co-Chairman Barrar and distinguished members of the Committee – I am John Bast, Fire Chief of Easton Fire Department and Chair of the Training & Operations Subcommittee for the SR 6 Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this hearing today; which I will provide an update on the work that has been done with the Training & Operations subcommittee.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has never defined the true meaning of a Firefighter or set a minimum level of required training it has been left up to the individual municipality and or Fire Company. The Pennsylvania fire service is the only emergency services group in the Commonwealth with no required training - Law Enforcement follows the Municipal Police Officers' Education & Training Commission (MPOETC) and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) follows the Department of Health requirements. The primary function of a Firefighter is to protect the community from disaster situations, including house and building fires, and promote an environment of public safety within the Commonwealth. This position also participates in fire prevention activities, equipment and station maintenance and training dealing with all phases of fire suppression, prevention, rescue and emergency operations.

Years ago it may have not been important but today the public expects professional service with very little cost. Most career departments have an entry level program that varies from department to department. The same goes for the volunteer service; there is no standard level of training for the Commonwealth's Fire Service.

Not having the proper level of training will lead to more injuries and possible line-of-duty deaths. In addition, the public will see an increase in civilian injuries and deaths. Emergencies are not discriminatory they do not care if the First Responder receives a paycheck or not; it will strike the rich as well as the poor and we have the responsibility to act.

Through minimum training standards we wish to achieve a common ground across the Commonwealth and adjust those standards based on rural, suburban and urban settings. We understand the limitations of bringing so many individuals up to this level and that it will take time.

As we move forward with the SR 6 Report we need to focus on the crisis we have been dealing with across the Commonwealth for over 20 years if not more; every time a new report comes out it paints a picture that we are afraid to admit is true. Currently, there is little standardization in deployment and operation of fire and EMS service resources and a declining number of personnel to respond. Response to a major catastrophic event, such as an act of terrorism would require a standardized and coordinated effort in order to save lives. Additionally, both fire and EMS agencies struggle to maintain adequate staffing levels as both volunteer pools and revenue streams continue to decline – negatively impacting their ability to respond to both every day and catastrophic emergencies.

Our subcommittee was tasked to look at training and operations; we quickly filled several pages with concerns and in order to accomplish anything we need to focus on a smaller area with hopes that would set the ground work for the future of fire & EMS delivery in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Our group is focused on using NFPA Standards 1710 and 1720 - NFPA 1710 (Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments) and NFPA 1720 (Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Departments).

When we talk about NFPA 1710 and NFPA 1720 it provides a framework for what we will refer to as a Standard of Cover which lays out how many trained firefighters and apparatus you should have responding to a fire and it allows for fluctuation based on rural, suburban and urban settings. If we don't start working on a standard for responses and training we will find ourselves here again in 10 years talking about the same problems.

Essentially, we need an agreed upon "tool kit" for fire chiefs, EMS chiefs, municipal managers and elected officials to utilize as a reference for addressing staffing, major purchases and operations of a cost effective, reliable and well trained "all hazard" response team. Emphasis will be placed on a response model that, in the event of a terrorist bombing or similar attack, will minimize loss of life and maximize effort; saving lives, property, loss of income, interruption of commerce and environmental effects.

Our final report will provide additional information regarding the standard of cover and minimum training standards which we hope will set the stage for change across the Commonwealth. Many of the topics we have discussed cross over subcommittees and we support the direction of all the groups as we move forward. But we need to remember that if we don't act on the crisis it's only going to get worse. In order for us to provide training to our first responders our State Fire Academy needs to be funded to support our path forward and that includes additional staffing. We need to make sure that our educational agencies all over the Commonwealth that are providing fire and EMS training are funded and supported to deliver the education our first responders need to provide the all hazards service our Citizens demand.

In closing and as we move forward with the SR 6 Report we urge you to step back and look at making fundamental changes to the way fire & EMS services are delivered across the

Commonwealth. Thank you for your leadership and taking the time to support emergency services in the Commonwealth. I am happy to answer questions you may have at this time.