

Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute  
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Testimony from Jerome Ozog, Executive Director  
Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

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The Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute is an advocacy and educational organization that represents volunteer and career fire and emergency services agencies across the Commonwealth. Our mission is to sustain and improve those services that are critical to the Public Safety of Pennsylvania. We advocate for those who provide critical public safety services to the citizens of the Commonwealth. We work with other Statewide organizations including the Fireman's Association of the State of Pennsylvania and the Career Fire Chiefs Association. We believe in collaboration and that one size does not fit all in our diverse Commonwealth.

The Fire Service is essential to public safety in Pennsylvania. Volunteer and career firefighters perform extraordinary duties every day in our rural communities, suburbs, and cities, and most recently during the flash flooding in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Firefighters rescued numerous people from floodwaters including one rescue captured on dramatic video in the Kennett Square area of Chester County. A life was saved, and lives are saved everyday across Pennsylvania by our dedicated firefighters, EMTs and Paramedics both volunteer and career. We are one fire service dedicated to our communities.

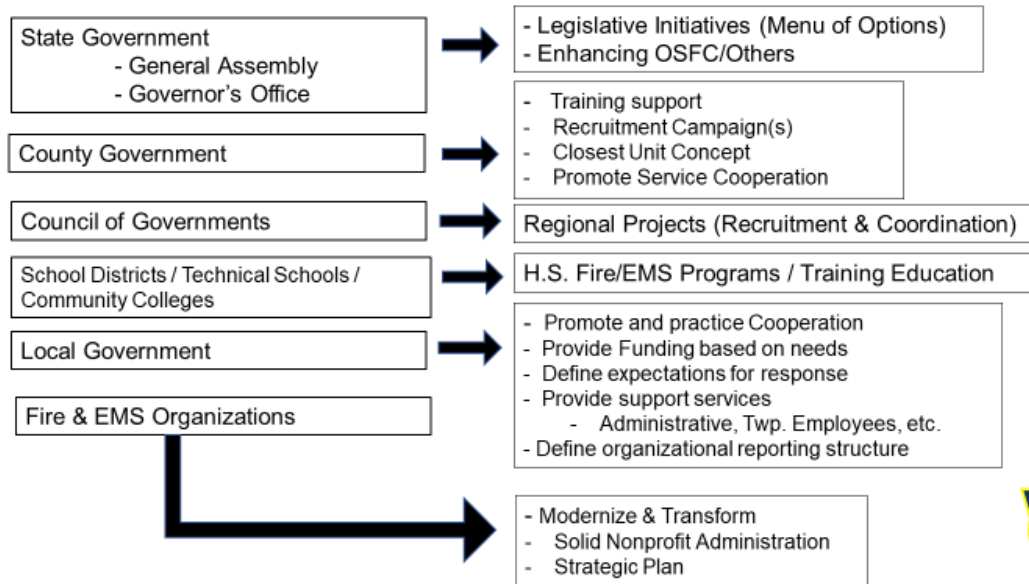
The SR 6 report has increased awareness and has created action at all levels of government and within fire service organizations. It has been used as a foundation for proposed changes in many local areas. It has been a tool to advocate for change not only in the General Assembly, but for statewide and county level organizations.

The two greatest issues facing our organizations continue to be money (both public dollars and donations) and people (volunteer and career) and that will not change overnight. A collaborative approach will continue to be needed at all levels of government to ensure a response.

We would like to thank you for supporting SB 331 – development of Pilot Fire Training Programs for School districts, SB 908 – moving Fire Relief Administration to the Fire Commissioner and increasing VLAP loan amounts, SB 910 – Renewal of the Fire & EMS Grant Program, and SB 987 – Restructuring of the Office of the State Fire Commissioner. We will be advocating with members of the House VA & EP Committee members to continue movement of these of these important bills. I know this committee understands the current situation facing our volunteer and career fire service and sincerely appreciate your continued attention and support. Many of you have long term associations with your local fire and emergency services organizations.

Strategically PFESI envisions and has endorsed the following survival strategy for Pennsylvania's Fire & Emergency Services:

## Statewide Survival Strategy for Fire & Emergency Services



This strategy will require all levels of government and the emergency services organizations to continually work on modernization and change. Assessing how we provide service and adopt innovative ways to serve our communities.

As SR 6 built the foundation, we ready to continue to move forward with the following recommendations:

**Relief Association Transformation** – It is universally known that Act 118 of 2010 needs modernized. Volunteer Fire Companies are required to maintain two separate legal entities with all necessary administrative records, tax identification numbers, and separate accounts. Additionally, there are many restrictions on the actual use of the funds. Municipalities who receive funds from various sources are not required to maintain separate legal organizations. Transforming the current system into a Block Grant Type allocation will allow local flexibility on the use of the funds and decrease the administrative burden on the volunteer organizations.

**Improving and modernizing Junior Firefighting Programs** – attracting youth into fire services organizations will assist in sustaining service and provide excellent life skills. The Child Labor law is currently restrictive and prohibits live fire and certain rescue training.

**Fire Police Enhancements** – Fire police provide a critical service to Pennsylvania's communities. They perform Traffic Incident Management and incident scene security. Some Fire Police are part of volunteer fire departments, some are separate organizations, and some work for the local Police Chief. A comprehensive look at modernizing the scope, authority and responsibility of Fire Police should occur.

**EMS Administration Funding** – HB 1838 which is currently in Senate Appropriations will provide a method to increase funding for critical rural EMS Training and support for the Emergency Medical Services Operating Fund. Recently our Nonprofit and county-based EMS regions and the Statewide Advisory Council were advised of an 11% cut from the DOH. These

organizations provide critical administrative functions to ambulance services and fire based quick response services.

**Fireworks** – The Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association, the Pennsylvania Municipal League and PFESI have been advocating for changes to the current law. We look forward to working with you as more discussions occur. We would like to thank Senator Browne for supporting changes within certain municipalities, but we feel this should be expanded to allow additional local control.

**Fire / EMS Authorities** – We fundamentally believe that adding Fire and EMS to the Municipal Authorities Act will provide local communities more options to sustain and improve service. SB 1274 is in my opinion the most innovative change that can be made by the General Assembly. We all know that the EMS system is struggling, it has been struggling for over 10 years. The fire service is also struggling. SB 1274 will provide another option for local government.

Senators, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the PFESI we would like to sincerely Thank You for the opportunity to provide testimony on these very important topics and that you for the continued support. We know your personal dedication to emergency services in the Commonwealth.

Additionally, I would like to publicly thank the Senate Staff members who have been intimately involved in the working with the various associations.