

Testimony from Jared Renshaw

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

September 13, 2021

Good afternoon, my name is Jared Renshaw, and I am the Fire Commissioner for the Western Berks Fire Department. I have been privileged to serve in this role and with this department since 2015. Western Berks is a regional, combination department, consisting of both volunteer and career members, who protect our residents and visitors, in a designated coverage area that encompasses two townships and two boroughs. Formed in 2009 as the result of a merger of four separate departments, we continue to this day to be an example of how local government cooperation can work, and be successful by putting the public's safety's needs first.

Along with my duties as Fire Commissioner, I also serve on the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute. 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 Firefighters Association of the State of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association, and the Pennsylvania Professional Firefighters Association. We believe in collaboration, and that one size does not fit all in our diverse Commonwealth.

My testimony today will discuss something that I am very passionate about, and that is fire service training, specifically recommendations from SR6. Training is one of the key components to having a competent and capable fire department, that is able to deliver a service that matches most mission statements and expectations, which is being all-hazards and all-risk. Recommendation 18, is for

the establishment of definitions, classifications, and training levels for fire service providers. Today, more than ever, fire departments are facing increasing call volumes, and expanded disciplines and responsibilities. Having clearly defined training requirements, assures that the responders have the requisite knowledge, and skill sets to effectively manage and mitigate an emergency incident. Minimum standards also contribute to the publics, and also firefighter safety. I would like to provide you with an example, of why training is so important.

In the early morning hours of June 13th of this year, my department and our automatic aid partners were dispatched to a residential structure fire. While acting in the capacity of the incident commander, I received the worst radio transmission of my career, one of my people calling a mayday. This firefighter was engaged in suppression operations on the first floor, and fell through a hole, where he became trapped between the first floor and the basement. Following our procedures, but more importantly the training he has received, he was able to transmit his call for help without error, and orient his body to not fall further down. His teammate, and another crew operating nearby, were able to come to his aid, and using the skills they have learned, and perfected, were able to extricate him, and move him to safety within 45 seconds. During our debriefing, this firefighter gave credit to not only the personnel who rescued him, but more importantly to his training, that he has received on mayday procedures and firefighter survival. Yes, we were lucky. But the preparation before this incident occurred, allowed this firefighter to go home with only minor injuries.

Recommendation 19 is to fund fire and EMS training at the commonwealth level. Fire trucks are no use without firefighters, and firefighters are no use without training and education. Due to the diversity of the commonwealth's fire service, regarding funding and training opportunities, steps must be taken to level the playing field. A fire scene can see multiple departments responding, with vast discrepancies in knowledge and training. Due in large part to the funding received by individual departments. Where monies that could be, and should be used for training is now going to other areas of operations. By providing funding at the commonwealth level, equal training opportunities can be made available

for all members of the fire service. This will increase overall safety, and the services provided to the residents and visitors.

In closing, I would like to quote Senator Williams, from a committee hearing that occurred on April 28, 2021. Senator Williams was discussing a meeting she had with Chief Delaney, where they spoke about SR6. Senator Williams said “I agree with Chief Delaney, as we hope that SR6 just doesn’t sit on a shelf”. Senator Williams, Chief Delaney, I agree with the both of you regarding that statement, as do many others across the commonwealth. I hope to see more recommendations from SR6 implemented soon.

I thank you for your time today, and for this opportunity.