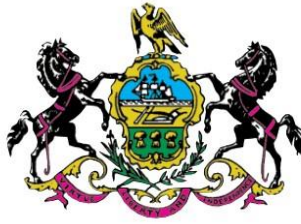


26TH DISTRICT  
STATE SENATOR  
**TIM KEARNEY**

SENATE BOX 203026  
THE STATE CAPITOL  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3026  
717-787-1350  
FAX: 717-787-0196

130 SOUTH STATE ROAD • SUITE 101  
SPRINGFIELD, PA 19064  
610-544-6120  
FAX: 610-544-6140

51 LONG LANE  
UPPER DARBY, PA 19082  
610-352-3409  
FAX: 610-352-3641



**Senate of Pennsylvania**

**COMMITTEES**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT,  
MINORITY CHAIR  
APPROPRIATIONS  
EDUCATION  
LABOR & INDUSTRY  
TRANSPORTATION**

EMAIL: [senatorkearney@pasenate.com](mailto:senatorkearney@pasenate.com)  
WEBSITE: [www.SenatorKearney.com](http://www.SenatorKearney.com)  
FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/SenTimKearney](https://facebook.com/SenTimKearney)  
TWITTER: @SenTimKearney  
INSTAGRAM: @SenTimKearney

**Remarks on Senate Bill 698 – Regional Public Safety Authorities  
Senator Tim Kearney  
Senate Veteran Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee Hearing  
October 12, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Stefano for the opportunity to speak with the committee about this legislation, Senate Bill 698.

I represent parts of Delaware and Chester counties, and like many regions in the state, our EMS system is close to a breaking point due to lack of proper reimbursement for their costs. As well, our fire companies are struggling with the endless burden of fundraising, administration, recruiting, ensuring coverage, and keeping up with the Jones', if you will. Most of our companies were not interested in the idea of regional cooperation 10 years ago. Today they have come to terms with some of the irreversible generational changes that have rocked the industry. We need a service model to ensure public safety for all.

As you know, one of the SR 6 report recommendations was to simplify the process of regionalization for both fire and EMS. This recommendation pointed towards the model of "service districts". In Pennsylvania, we know them as authorities. Pennsylvania's Municipalities Authorities Act provides for the creation, governance, and management of many types of authorities, from sewer and water authorities to transportation and even swimming pools, but it does not explicitly provide for Fire and EMS. Rather than reinvent the wheel, this legislation makes minimal tweaks to the Municipalities Authorities Act to authorize counties to create public safety authorities, which could support fire and EMS providers.

Specifically, Senate Bill 698:

- Authorizes counties to incorporate authorities to provide EMS, fire, and related supportive services,
- It gives municipalities the right to choose to participate or to keep their fire and EMS as they are,
- It instructs state agencies to provide technical assistance to counties exploring whether to start a public safety authority,
- And it provides an option for municipalities within a county to create a regional joint public safety authority if the county government chooses not to form one.

This approach allows county communities to decide what kind of organization is right for them, if any. Instead of a one size fits all model, each region will have the choice to design the specific function and purpose of a public safety authority. For one county, that could be an authority that just supports its fire companies by helping with fundraising and recruitment. For another county, it could be an EMS Authority that covers areas where there is no EMS coverage at all currently. We want this to be a flexible tool that can be customized to a community's needs.

26TH DISTRICT  
STATE SENATOR  
**TIM KEARNEY**

SENATE BOX 203026  
THE STATE CAPITOL  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3026  
717-787-1350  
FAX: 717-787-0196

130 SOUTH STATE ROAD • SUITE 101  
SPRINGFIELD, PA 19064  
610-544-6120  
FAX: 610-544-6140

51 LONG LANE  
UPPER DARBY, PA 19082  
610-352-3409  
FAX: 610-352-3641



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### COMMITTEES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT,  
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APPROPRIATIONS  
EDUCATION  
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TRANSPORTATION

EMAIL: [senatorkearney@pasenate.com](mailto:senatorkearney@pasenate.com)  
WEBSITE: [www.SenatorKearney.com](http://www.SenatorKearney.com)  
FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/SenTimKearney](https://www.facebook.com/SenTimKearney)  
TWITTER: @SenTimKearney  
INSTAGRAM: @SenTimKearney

To be clear, the legislation in no way authorizes a new public safety authority to hostilely “take over” existing companies. It only allows for authorities to be created to **support** existing companies, or to provide EMS coverage where no companies exist.

Mainly, I envision public safety authorities as shared service providers for fire and EMS companies across a given region. If an authority can build a strong balance sheet and pool procurement, it can get more affordable financing terms for new assets and equipment. If it can take away the burden of business administration, grant writing, reporting and paperwork, and other tasks, then our companies can focus on saving lives. I believe this will help make the industry more attractive to volunteers, and more affordable in the long term than paying for fire and EMS service individually in every municipality.

Importantly, if a county decides to create a public safety authority, it would be optional for municipalities to work with the authority, and the authority would not provide services for or assess fees in any municipality unless the municipality chose to contract with the authority. If a municipality’s fire company is working well currently, the creation of a public safety authority would not compel them to join or change anything. But for a municipality who might have lost their EMS provider, or whose company needs more support than the municipality can give on its own, working with a resourced regional authority might be just what the doctor ordered.

Senate Bill 698 provides options for all, because as we know here in Pennsylvania, one size does not fit all. With that said, we know countywide authorities won’t be the right solution in every county, but they will be helpful for many counties.

I believe the legislation could apply to rural counties and suburban counties is responsive to the needs of the EMS and fire companies while being responsible for residents. Most importantly, I believe public safety authorities will help improve the life-saving services that our communities depend on, make first responders’ lives easier, and will help keep Pennsylvanians safe.

Again, I want to thank Senator Stefano and Senator Muth for the invitation to address the committee and for their staff for organizing this hearing.