

Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute
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Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

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Testimony from Jerry Brant, Board Member

Good afternoon, my name is Jerry Brant, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute. I currently serve as the Second Assistant Chief of the Patton Fire Company#1 of Patton Borough in Cambria County.

I have been an active in the fire service for 52 years and served as Chief of the Hope Fire Company in Northern Cambria for 15 years. I am the founder of Decoplan Associates LLC which is a firm focused on planning, consulting and grant writing for emergency services agencies and municipal governments. My business takes me across the country interacting with emergency service providers.

Patton Fire Company provides a full complement of fire and rescue services to two boroughs and four townships in rural north central Cambria County. Our coverage area is home to 7,500 year-round residents and encompasses 98.9 square miles. We operate from one station utilizing 42 active firefighters to answer approximately 200 alarms per year. Patton Fire company is one of two departments that provides coverage to Prince Gallitzin State Park which now attracts over 2.2 million visitors annually.

When I joined the fire service in 1969 the last thing on any firefighter's mind were items like recruitment of new members, retention of existing members, scratching on alarms or having enough money to pay their bills. In fact, a few years after I joined

my department closed its charter because we had so many members. Times were different then. The local economy was booming. You could graduate one day and have a job in the mines, steel mills or on the railroad the next day.

Because of a long tenure in the fire service, I have the opportunity to look at these issues from both sides. Today I would like to talk about some numbers from my panoramic view of the situation. When I mention numbers, I'm not here to discuss 300,000, 150,000 or 38,000. We have heard those numbers over and over. I'm here to help you focus on some other statistics.

In 1986 there were 8 Line of Duty Deaths (LoDD) in Pa. which was 7% of the national total. That year Pa had a civilian fire death rate of 27.1 per million.

In 1996 Pa had 6 Line of Duty Deaths for 6.3% of the national total. Our civilian death rate had dropped to 18.8 deaths per million population. That was the same figure as the national death rate. Pa was statistically located in the middle of all states for civilian fire death rate. It looked like we were starting to make some progress.

In 2006 we experienced 6 LoDDs which was 5.6% of the national total. However, our civilian statistics were starting to climb. We had a fire death rate of 19.9 per million population which placed us 10th in the nation. That year the national fire death rate was 13.2

By 2018 Pa had 8 LoDDs which accounted for 7.3% of the national total. Even though Pa has been consistently averaging between 6 to 8 LODDs per year the rest of the nation has been working to reduce their numbers. When you look at these statistics, they show that in 1986 Pennsylvania had a line of duty death for every 18,750 firefighters. 2018 statistics show us that Pennsylvania now has a line of duty death per every 4,750 firefighters. That statistic alone is scary. However, another troubling piece of information is that Pennsylvania led the nation in civilian fire deaths last year. These statistics demonstrate the critical need to address issues that are affecting the delivery of fire services in our state.

The passage of SB 698 would provide fire departments and municipal governments with another tool to assist in reversing these statistics. For decades communities have used municipal authorities as a vehicle to successfully provide everything from water and sewer service to downtown business district improvements, to cable television. SB 698 would allow the formation of Public Service Authorities. These authorities could provide fire departments with group purchasing capabilities, standardized operating procedures across departments, the ability to float bonds for construction projects, eliminate the duplication of equipment and apparatus, provide for uniform fees and taxes across municipal boundaries, assist with administrative duties, and bolster recruiting and retention activities.

Everyone in this room today has been working diligently to address the critical situation with the fire service in Pennsylvania. I am asking you to stay the course, to advance and pass SB 698, and to continue your work on other initiatives that are critical to the fire service. Thank you for this opportunity and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.