

**TESTIMONY TO THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS
& EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE
AND THE
MAJORITY POLICY COMMITTEE
ADAMS COUNTY FIRE TRAINING CENTER,
GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
OCTOBER 25, 2013**

By Jerry Poland, Fire Chief

Bonneauville Community Volunteer Fire Company Inc.

Executive Board Member, PFESI.

Good Morning Senator Baker, Members of the Committee, Elected Officials, and Guests, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning on many of the issues facing Pennsylvania's Fire and Emergency Service Community. My name is Jerry Poland, and I am the volunteer Fire Chief at the Bonneauville Community Volunteer Fire Company Inc., and Board member of the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute. Having served in my volunteer Department for over 35 years, I would like to speak with you today on the many issues facing the Emergency Services, but most importantly, state and local funding, and its effect on individual Departments on not only how they recruit, retain, and train members, but continue to operate their individual Departments as a business while losing public financial support in staggering numbers.

The Volunteer Fire and Emergency services provided throughout the Commonwealth is the last remaining totally volunteer utility in most if not all counties in Pennsylvania. Training mandates, while vitally important, coupled with funding the very service we provide has placed most volunteer Departments in a very precarious and possibly service ending position.

The Establishment of Fire and Emergency Medical Services act of March 17th 2008, Act No. 7, No. 8 and No.9, mandate that local level government, including boroughs and townships be responsible for providing the fire and emergency services, including the appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services. The Act further calls for the municipality to meet with the emergency service providers on a yearly basis to discuss the emergency services needs of the municipality. Enforcement of these Acts would allow most Departments the availability to lessen the time constraints on their members through fund raising events, and help retain members for a longer period of time within the service. As an example, when my Department has a prospective member, we must explain that they need over 200 hours of training to ride any fire apparatus, 200 plus additional hours to provide EMS, and then do 45-65 fund raisers a year for us to pay for the very service we provide. At this point, most volunteers are not interested, as they cannot make that kind of time commitment to any organization. 30 years ago this month, then State Fire Commissioner Chet Henry, while speaking at a conference, spoke of a LOSAP or Length of Service Award Program to help volunteers recruit and then retain those members for a longer period of time, after the Departments initial investment into the member. Here we are 30 years later, and no closer to a state or county wide LOSAP program for our volunteers. We only need to look to our surrounding states to see the benefit that a LOSAP type program does in retaining trained members within their Departments.

While we have been somewhat fortunate in Adams County to have a strong working relationship with the Adams County Council of Governments, some municipalities still struggle to understand their responsibility and commitment to those who have elected them. Unlike most of rural Pennsylvania, we are fortunate to have planned and developed a working relationship with most of our local municipalities.

The volunteer Fire and Emergency Services is the last true volunteer utility that must pay its own way to provide the services demanded by our citizens, and those municipalities we serve. A local fire tax could generate less than \$1 per week from each household, while still providing the necessary funds to manage and maintain the financial stewardship of the Department. In comparison, most households pay over \$150.00 per month for cable and cell service, \$50.00 a month for sanitation pick up, and \$60.00 for water and sewer, a month. To put that in perspective, if half of the citizens in my hometown paid \$150.00 a month for cable and cell service that would result in a monthly bill of \$135,000 per month. In comparison they would pay less than \$50.00 per year per household for fire and EMS service. Most volunteer departments will tell you that within the past 5 years annual donations have decreased with some areas experiencing less than 20% of their citizenry donating to the Department. This coupled with some local government's refusal to not only meet, but work with the service providers for their municipality, places their very citizenry in a position of delayed or no serviced at their time of need. The Volunteers simply cannot continue to pay for the very service they provide. This is an unacceptable business model, and one that has reached the end of its serviceable life.

In closing, while the enactment of Act 7, Act 8 and Act 9 of 2008 providing mandated funding for the fire and emergency services is seen as a profound improvement, the very fact that there is no enforcement by state government to educate and reinforce the requirements of the law and to mandate municipal government's requirements under the Act, continue to weaken the very foundation of the volunteer services, and will lead to the volunteer demise. A demise that will bring catastrophic financial results for the citizens of the Commonwealth. Please consider enforcement of Act 7, Act8 and Act 9 of 2008, along with LOSAP funding to help maintain and supplement the volunteers needed to continue this valuable service.