

**Testimony of Don Konkle, Executive Director  
PA Fire & Emergency Services Institute  
March 8, 2016**

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Chairmen Vulakovich, Costa, Barrar, Sainato and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Donald Konkle. I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Service Institute and the Law and Legislative Chair of the Fireman's Association of the State of Pennsylvania. I have been involved in the fire service since 1967, including 37 years as a member of the Harrisburg Bureau of Fire; 27 of those years as Chief.

PFESI primary mission is to identify trends and challenges facing Pennsylvania's emergency services, obtain consensus on the solutions to those challenges and to educate policy makers and the emergency services about possible solutions.

Today the fire service is facing almost unprecedented challenges. In addition to concerns about manpower and budgets the fire service is facing a new and perhaps unprecedented challenge. That being fires burn faster, hotter, and produce more smoke and toxins than ever before. Research from Underwriters Laboratories and the National Institute of Standards has proven this. Many firefighters have thought this for several years, but now the research proves this.

Several factors have combined to create an almost perfect storm.

First, the furnishings in our homes are made largely of byproducts of oil and natural gas, creating an extremely combustible environment. This leads to flashover occurring at least 10 times

faster than previously documented. Flashover is a condition where an entire area and its contents explosively and simultaneously erupt into fire. Neither firefighters nor civilians are capable of surviving the phenomenon of flashover.

Second, is the design of newer homes. Open floor plans have resulted in fewer walls and doors to slow the spread of fire and smoke. When flashover occurs an entire floor or the entire home explodes in flames.

Third, are new construction methods, such as lightweight beams and now lightweight stairs which results in very early and often deadly structural or floor collapse. These, collapses often occur without the traditional early warning indications of collapse.

Both early flashovers and collapse result in serious injury or death to firefighters attempting search and rescue or interior attack.

We are working hard to develop new strategy and tactics to combat today's different fires. As a result new training has been developed to address this hazard.

Training is a important issue in the fire service today. Training is vital as it affects responder safety, our ability to deliver high quality reliable services to citizens and recruiting and retention. In the 1970s and 80s training was often accomplished by shadowing an experienced firefighter ; however, given today's more volatile fire this type of on the job training to dangerous to accomplish safely. New firefighters should be trained in controlled environment.

An examination of training concerns quickly gets you to two recurring themes. Those being time and treasure.

Time spent training is a concern and is often listed as a reason volunteers leave or do not join a fire department. Currently the time to train a new firefighter to a firefighter 1 is 140 hours. That time not only includes classroom time but time spent traveling to the class.

That travel time is all too often close to 1 hour. Note time spent fundraising is the number one reason volunteers leave.

That brings us to the second concern about training, cost. The cost of training is a growing concern. In many areas of the Commonwealth the cost to properly train a volunteer firefighter exceeds \$2500.

Many of our fire departments can no longer afford to certify their firefighters and have asked firefighter to pay for their own training.

We can reduce classroom time spent on training by developing and delivering quality web based blended training. This will provide firefighters a more flexible schedule to receive training, reduce travel time, and cost. In order to accomplish this we need funding. The current estimate is \$1,300,000,000 to get the core course on-line.

Harrisburg Area Community College has recently developed web based blend fire classes. They have been well received and attracted students from all regions of the state. The ability to attract a state wide audience is of particular note. Because students are only required to attend two 8 hour Saturday sessions in person and complete the other course requirements on line it makes traveling to Harrisburg a reasonable solution to take a course not being offered in their region. We believe in the future blended on-line courses will reduce cost, increase the availability of classes, and allow for a more flexible less burdensome schedule

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Recruiting and Retention continue to be a critical problem for both fire and EMS. Again when you ask people why they are leaving the volunteer service time spent on fund raising is a frequent answer.

State funded programs such as the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program, the Fire and EMS grant program and the Fireman's Relief are very helpful. However, additional funding in both Fireman's Relief and the Grant Program are needed.

PFESI is working with local fire companies and municipalities to increase local funding.

There has been a paradigm shift over the last decade and that is many people are no longer willing to make the commitment to volunteering for and emergency service without some incentives.

There are currently two bills that provide incentives that have already passed in either House or the Senate. Both authorize municipalities to grant tax breaks to active volunteers. They are HB 1683 and SB 299. PFESI appreciates the work done in both chambers during the past several sessions. Similar bills have been passed with large majorities in both house, however they have never passed in the same session. It is time to act jointly and get this done. HB 1683 provides for a property tax rebate, while SB299 provides for an earned income tax reduction. Not all municipalities levy an earned income tax. For this reason we believe HB 1683 makes this incentive available to the most volunteers. We support giving the municipalities their choice which tax to offer a rebate.

HB 1272 will allow emergency services to bill for service. The bill is currently in the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Services Committee. . We support the concept of billing. Billing for service

is one additional tool that will allow us to reduce our current reliance on fund raising. However, the bill requires some amendments before moving forward.

HB 62 and SB 370 both extend the hold harmless period from 5 to 10 years when merged companies apply for the Fire and EMS grant

There is a pending piece of legislation that the emergency services strongly oppose. SB 1055 will allow the purchase and use of Class C fireworks. This will lead to additional injuries and fires. Despite the promise of much needed funding provided in the bill we cannot in good conscience support SB 1055.

In 2004 Senate Resolution 60 resulted in a working group that produced a report that recommended 23 specific actions to help our emergency services. Some of the solutions have been passed into law many have seen no action at all. Perhaps it is time to revisit the SR 60 report, revise where necessary, and recommend a comprehensive package of legislation to help Pennsylvania's emergency service.

We would like to thank the members for the beneficial bills that have passed this session.

HB 911 has stabilized funding for 911 centers.

HB 347 will allow EMS companies to directly bill insurance companies.

HB 1276 eliminated the cost of background checks for volunteers.

HB 138 permits filling the boot fund raising

HB 152 extended the filling period for LOD death benefits from 90 days to 4 years,

SB 877 increased penalties for increased penalties for a driver who hit and injure first responder.

Obviously, the fire service is facing many challenges. The solutions must be found. Many of the solutions need and will come from within the fire service and other solutions will need assistance from federal, state, and local governments.

Thank you I would be happy to answer questions.