

**TESTIMONY
TO THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
VETERANS AFFAIRS
&
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
COMMITTEE**

August 23, 2016
Monroe County Public Safety Training Center

William F. Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFO, CTO, FIFE
Co-Chair, Senate Resolution 60 Commission of 2004

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Members of the Pennsylvania House and Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees, thank you for the opportunity to address you today regarding Pennsylvania's emergency response situation and actions you and your peers can take to keep our system strong. The primary responders to incidents of medical emergency, fire, rescue, disaster impacts, hazardous materials events, and even the proverbial cat in the tree face great challenges today. The data tells the story; career staffing cannot be sustained, volunteers continue to reduce in number, fire companies are on the verge of closing due to a lack of funds, health care systems are leaving the out-of-hospital care arena while fire stations take on added duties; and the people of the Commonwealth are less served.

While I could speak to you on the technical day-to-day issues; having served as Fire Chief in both East Bethlehem Township in Washington County and King of Prussia, Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County; as Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township, the Past-President of the Pennsylvania Emergency Services Institute and current President of the Congressional Fire Services Institute and working daily with emergency response agencies in my role at VFIS, the country's largest insurer of emergency service organizations; I am speaking to you tonight as the Co-Chair of Senate Resolution 60 Commission of 2004. In that role, our team developed a series of 23 administrative and legislative initiatives deemed in need of being addressed to enhance and sustain the then current system. While some quick actions were taken, some important areas of action still need attention. I am here

tonight to remind you of what was effectively achieved and what still needs to be done – warranting validation and suggested action through what we affectionately will call SR60 2.0.

On July 25, 2016, at PEMA headquarters in Harrisburg, a group convened to review the status of the 23 recommendations and engaged in discussion on what has changed and what needs to be done. It is no secret that volunteers save the Commonwealth BILLIONS of dollars in taxes each year, by not having to hire and manage career staffs. However, our career departments are just as challenged with reduced staffing and funding, coupled with an changing out-of-hospital medical care response capability.

Based upon the summary that day, we found that great strides were made in the areas of

- defining the responsibility for assuring each community has some level of fire and emergency medical service provision
- enabling administrative relief and waiving reporting and fee requirements on specific items
- expanding state contracts for requirements to reduce costs
- permitting a local emergency services tax to help fund public safety
- continuing the Volunteer fire/EMS grant program
- supporting EMS direct payments for service; and
- enabling a tax rate modification for local communities to fund fire/EMS

However, action still needs to be taken regarding

- understanding the next 5 to 10 years of impact on rural and remote areas of the Commonwealth
- understanding the changing role of health care and out-of-hospital service (community paramedicine and mobile integrated health care) upon fire and ems agencies
- providing more funding (through Act 84 funds) for providing benefits for personnel to both protect them and incent them to serve; and solidify career pension funds

- finding a way to enable Fire and EMS Authorities, Districts and Regional Plans to be viable and improve the ultimate system
- Length of Service Award program use in retaining volunteers and funding through Act 84 monies,
- fire and EMS Training program ease of access, funding, and accessibility in ALL high schools in the Commonwealth
- keeping youth in the commonwealth for higher education by incenting them to serve and go to a Pennsylvania institution of higher learning
- having a program for college loan forgiveness or repayment process (to all state colleges receiving state subsidies) for qualified volunteers
- recognition that a menu of firefighter/EMS incentives should be adopted for Act 84 funding approval, including local options to choose what is important locally to recruit and retain volunteers,
- reform the code adoption process to enable enhanced fire safety options that support firefighter safety
- prevention of the continued raiding of the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program to meet general budget obligations of the state;

and more.

Politics cannot play a role in the number one obligation of elected officials. I know, I am an elected official and the safety of the public is the primary purpose of local government; but we need legislative and regulatory support at the state level to make it work.

Those of us who were involved in leading that important first step, some 12 years ago, believe it made a difference, but needs to be refreshed to identify the issues of today and the next five to ten years, for legislative and administrative action to keep our emergency response system at the top of its game.

Members of the Committee we, the fire and EMS community of Pennsylvania ask you to revise the SR 60 Commission via resolutions from both houses in the interest of the Commonwealth's long term public safety.

Thank you for your time today and more importantly for being open to considering additional enhancements of keeping the public safe.