

TESTIMONY
ON AUGUST 23, 2016
TO THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
VETERAN'S AFFAIRS
&
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
COMMITTEE

**LOCATION: MONROE COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY
TRAINING CENTER**

FRANK J. ZANGARI, FIRE CHIEF

STATEWIDE ADVISORY BOARD CHAIRMAN

PRESIDENT, SCHUYLKILL COUNTY FIRE CHIEFS

I would first like to thank the members of the Pennsylvania House and Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees for the opportunity to discuss current and future concerns involving our Pennsylvania emergency responders.

As we all know, our emergency services are dwindling each year from the volunteers in numbers of thirty years ago to numbers today that are shocking. Our average age of active firefighters in Schuylkill County is about forty years old. Recruitment is difficult. As most men and women are required to have full time jobs to support their families, this leaves little time for activities such as volunteering in today's emergency services, including fund raising. Long training hours also make it difficult for new volunteers to accomplish the needed training for today's fire service. We all know fires burn faster and hotter than thirty years ago.

In my role as President of the Fire Chiefs Association of Schuylkill County for the past twenty four years and Chairmen of PFESI's Statewide Advisory Board, I have been asked to address funding sources, coordinators that may be able to help us with administrative support and a mechanism of on-line training that can be presented to new volunteers.

Let me take a moment to discuss funding resources. Although, the State grant assists many fire companies in debt reduction and in purchasing new equipment, it is still far from accomplishing a consistent source of funding for our emergency services. I would like to see funding for the transition of volunteers to career positions within our Commonwealth. I believe, we sometimes forget the goals of some volunteers to become career firefighters. I also believe that career firefighters will increase over the next twenty years. We need to include our career firefighters in future funding sources.

I have heard many ideas throughout our great Commonwealth of programs dealing with recruitment and retention of volunteers. I have worked as a State employee in the Department of Public Welfare for forty one years in a civil service position. I find it amazing that we have not proposed for our volunteers, whom meet a certain level of training, additional points in their civil service exam as we do with our veterans. I would like to see an additional five points awarded on a civil service exam to applicants who meet a required level of training.

I would recommend to this committee that we consider regional coordinators that can assist in the administration process of volunteer fire companies. I read articles all the time of monies that are misappropriated within the emergency

services. I know many fire companies who would like to have assistance in grant writing as well as financial support in record keeping for audits.

On the Fireman's Relief side, I would greatly appreciate consideration and support in assuring each Relief Association is afforded a minimum of \$10,000.00 annually. This would almost double the current amount distributed in my small community. Obviously, this money can also be utilized in purchasing equipment and for training.

As we listen to the millennium men and women, we hear constantly that the training is too long and there has to be a better way. It makes me wonder with all the on-line programs why we cannot institute some of the initial training requirements to a computer based program. I believe in today's society, this would assist in recruitment of volunteers, given the opportunity to train at their convenience. I still strongly believe if the choice is to advance in the fire service to a skilled level, class room and field training must still be required.

On July 25, 2016, I had an opportunity to be part of a working group to review and update the twenty three recommendations to up-date resolution 60. I was honored to be in a room full of men and women from different backgrounds' , political, career and volunteer all reviewing and

addressing the same concerns within our emergency services. We need to stay together as a group to address, repair and build on a future of the volunteer emergency services.

I would ask at today's testimony that you consider funding for on-line courses, recruitment, retention and regional coordinator support volunteers. I also strongly believe working with the Civil Service Commission to set a point value for those volunteers who want to further their opportunities to be in a career position would entice volunteers. This would in turn continue to improve the fire and emergency services in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In closing, I have only touched on a few areas in my testimony that will reflect on how we can address today's emergency responders. I would like to thank the committee for their time and interest in working to revise SR 60.