

Legislative Priorities of the Fire Service

- Enacting a package of bills that address retention and recruitment
- Providing no or low cost training programs, develop web-based training
- Identifying a potential funding source that adequately addresses these issues

Retention & Recruitment

The Fireman's Association of the State of Pennsylvania (FASP) and the Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Service Institute (PFESI) believe that a variety of incentives are necessary to slow the decline in the ranks and encourage more individuals to join the fire service. An incentive that a young person just out of high school finds attractive, will more than likely not be as appealing to someone with a family and a full-time job. Therefore, we have suggested that a "toolbox" of incentives be created to appeal to a broad base of potential volunteers.

Legislative proposals over the years have included:

- State and local tax credits
- Tuition assistance for post high school education/job training
- Education loan forgiveness
- Employer tax credits
- Length of service awards
- Permit participation in state health insurance programs
- Allow VFRA money to be used for retention and recruitment
- Discounts on driver's license and registration fees

Training

One of the most frequent issues voiced by volunteer firefighters is the cost and the time commitment required to attend classroom training. Further, the amount of training required by volunteer departments has also been cited as a primary impediment to individuals looking to join the fire service. The associated costs to train a firefighter are born by Fireman's Relief organizations, the local fire department of the firefighter personally. This creates an obvious burden on many of our underfunded department.

The funding and development of an internet based, e-learning training delivery system will make training more flexible. Time on the training ground will still be required to master skills like hose advancement, placing and climbing ladders and working in smoke and heat. However, the classroom time could be reduced as much as 60% of training can be delivered electronically. A goal of the fire service is to identify a funding source that would underwrite the cost of the basic courses, thus eliminating the current funding burden.

Potential Funding Sources

Both volunteer firefighter relief associations (VFRA's) and paid firefighters receive money from a 2% tax on homeowner insurance policies issued by out-of-state insurance providers. The Auditor General distributed \$68 million to VFRA's and transferred \$15 million to the Municipal Pension Aid Fund in 2014. By increasing the percentage by 0.5%, an additional \$17 million could be realized, and if increased by 1% the total would be \$34 million. The average homeowner insurance policy is \$660, which would increase by \$3.30 and \$6.60 respectively on an annual basis if the increase were enacted.

It is worth noting that the tax on domestic insurance premiums is currently directed to the general fund. If the rate were increased, it has been suggested that the proceeds be used to create a small disaster relief fund to provide state assistance to victims of disaster not eligible for FEMA relief funding.

In addition to providing funding for retention & recruitment initiatives and training, the increase in revenue could be used to raise the amount of money all VFRA's receive to \$10,000 annually.



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