

Dear Mr. Wolf:

The Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute submits the following questions concerning your position on critical fire and emergency service issues. Please note that it is expected that if you support an issue your administration will actively work to pass enabling legislation.

Please submit your written response via e-mail to pfesi@verizon.net

The Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute is an association of emergency service organizations, emergency responders, industry, and elected officials. We research, exchange information, and cultivate relationships among constituents about the issues affecting emergency response and life safety issues in Pennsylvania.

Our goal is to research, provide recommendations, and communicate issues to emergency service organizations, statewide advisory groups, interested individuals, and the community at large. We provide information through speakers, instructors, seminars, position papers, print and electronic media. We offer testimony for hearings, committee meetings, and provide information to legislative staff.

We facilitate relationships by participating in coalition meetings, leading relationship development between local governments and emergency service providers, and encouraging discussion among interested parties. We uphold positions on legislation supporting implementation of solutions for emergency service issues and concerns. Our guiding relationship principles are to promote collaboration and consensus among constituents and interested parties.

1. The Pennsylvania Fire Service and EMS is in crisis evidenced by the decline of volunteers. In 1976 there were 300,000 volunteers today there is approximately 50,000. The emergency services face great challenges in funding their departments. Enclosed is a report Firefighting Today which provides a fuller description of the problem. Career Departments are facing many of the same challenges.

Pennsylvania EMS attrition rates reflect an annual loss of about 4000 providers. Most EMS agency level surveys are indicating an urgency to find more providers to meet increasing community demands especially in rural areas although the provider "shortage" is widespread across the commonwealth.

What policies and programs would you support to help our struggling emergency services?

I know our volunteer fire companies are essential to creating safe communities. In order to ensure resident safety, I know we need to address recruitment issues and funding challenges.

As governor, I'll work with local leaders and first responders to assess the financial and personnel obstacles and look for innovative solutions such as encouraging regional planning and coordination.

2. Do you support the continued use of the ICC Code as Pennsylvania's construction code?

I believe that nationally recognized building codes should form the basis for the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code, with limited amendments to account for local circumstances. As governor, I would work to amend Act 1 of 2011 so that our codes remain up-to-date, our first responders are protected from dangerous conditions, and Pennsylvania residents are living and working in safe and healthy environments. While working to amend Act 1, I will appoint qualified professionals to the Review and Advisory Council, who are committed to ensuring the codes are regularly updated and in-line with national standards.

3. Do you support keeping residential fire sprinkler requirements in place?

As governor, I will work with key stakeholders, including firefighters and home builders, to investigate this issue and develop policy solutions aimed at keeping homeowners safe.

4. Do you support amending Act 84, the Volunteer Firemen's Relief Act, to insure that all Volunteer Firemen's Relief Associations receive a minimum of \$10,000 per year?

I believe we need to make sure residents across the state have access to high quality fire fighters. As governor, I will work with volunteer fire companies and local leaders to evaluate the current formula for distributing state funds and assess policy solutions, such as encouraging and facilitating regional planning and collaboration.

5. Do you support the direct payment for services rendered (outside of a contract) to EMS Agencies by insurance companies vs. payment to the patient?

I understand that the requirement that EMS agencies provide care to patients in need frequently creates difficulties in obtaining reimbursement. As governor, I'll study this issue to evaluate means of improving reimbursement.

6. Do you support an increase in direct funding to EMS agencies, especially since the current fund has not had an increase since it was established in 1985 (EMS Operating Fund)? Current system funding has depleted reserves with stagnant income the need to continue to improve quality care is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve solely on reimbursements.

I understand that EMS agencies across the state face significant financial challenges. As governor, I will work with EMS agencies to explore reforms that will ensure EMS agencies can continue providing high-quality emergency care.

7. Will you support an expanded community health care role for EMS, with payments for services rendered under the Medicaid program? Further will you support an increased general reimbursement for EMS via the Medicaid program?

I know EMS workers are essential to providing life-saving, emergency care. Clearly, EMS agencies are facing financial obstacles that are impacting their ability to deliver services. As governor, I will work with EMS agencies to better understand these financial difficulties, and I will include these first responders in relevant health care policy discussions.

8. The 2014/15 budget transferred \$30 million from the Volunteer Loan Fund to help fill the budget gap. Will you repay the fund?

The \$30M transfer from the Volunteer Loan Fund was one of many gimmicks used by Governor Corbett to mask the effect of his failed policies and produce a “balanced” budget. I know budgets should be built on sound financial policy, not one-time revenue sources or faulty projections. As governor, I will budget responsibly and work with volunteer firefighters to ensure they have the resources needed to keep residents safe.

9. What are you prepared to do to reduce the state imposed costs on provider agencies in training, planning, equipment and communications?

I know the State needs to do a better job of funding mandates. As governor, I will work with first responders to assess training, planning, equipment, and communications requirements and explore options so that first responders are prepared to handle a variety of emergency situations.

10. Will you consult with PFESI and its partners on the appointment or retention of the State Fire Commissioner?

As governor, I will work with key stakeholders, like PFESI, to identify highly qualified candidates for appointment.

Please provide your plan or policy statement on how you intend to support and strengthen the Pennsylvania’s fire departments, EMS agencies, and EMAs.

Previously, I served on the board of Glatfelter Insurance, which has a division that provides insurance services to emergency service organizations. Through that work, I know that Pennsylvania’s fire departments, EMS agencies, and EMAs are crucial to the safety and security of Pennsylvania residents. As governor I’ll work with them to ensure that they are able to continue providing efficient and effective services to residents across the commonwealth.

Don Konkle
Executive Director
PA Fire & Emergency Services Institute