

EMS Day at the Capitol April 10th, 2019

Issue Paper: Emergency Services and Fire “District” Legislation

Presented By: Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association, Professional Ambulance Association of Wisconsin, Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin EMS Association.

Our four associations are advocating for **the introduction of legislation or fiscal language which would enable communities to consolidate existing municipal-based fire and emergency services agencies into regionalized “districts” recognized by the State of Wisconsin as stand-alone governmental entities.** These “districts” would have the ability to adopt and enforce codes and ordinances, bond for capital improvement projects, and have limited taxing authority to support the operational budgets associated with the provision of emergency services within their defined jurisdictional boundaries. While there are currently several regionalized fire and emergency service organizations within the state which refer to themselves as “districts”, they do not possess the previously mentioned authority, and instead operate under contractual agreements between participating municipalities.

While we recognize these existing “districts” within our state as leading, progressive agencies making tremendous strides in the provision of fiscally responsible, efficient, and effective emergency services, we would argue that the process associated with entering into these complex contractual agreements between participating municipalities represents a significant barrier to the regionalization of these critical services. Furthermore, the current model under which these “districts” are operating requires one of the participating communities to assume the responsibility of borrowing for capital projects, creating an additional layer of complexity as well as liability in the development of these contractual agreements. Additionally, every community involved in these current “districts” maintains the autonomy to adopt and enforce fire codes and ordinances which can create conflicting standards amongst participating municipalities, and subsequent enforcement and compliance challenges for the “district” itself.

Our proposal to bring forth legislation allowing for the formation of regional emergency services and fire districts in Wisconsin would provide for a more fiscally responsible, efficient, and effective model for the provision of emergency services and fire to your constituents through:

- The reduction of duplicated services provided throughout both regional metropolitan, as well as rural areas of the state
- Streamlined organizational structures, administrative oversight, and operational processes
- Improved distribution and concentration of fire and emergency services facilities, equipment, resources, and personnel

- Improved service provision through enhanced reliability, consistency, operational resiliency, and coordination for major incidents and events which would overwhelm standalone municipal agencies
- Enhanced fiscal transparency through compartmentalization of the delivery of emergency services and fire, and their associated limited taxing authority

While there are numerous examples of both the fiscal benefits and service level enhancements commonly used to demonstrate the benefit of this type of regionalization including the reduction in the number of required aerial ladder trucks over consolidated geographical service areas, improved interoperability amongst responders, and streamlined budgeting and purchasing processes, we would propose that it is essential to recognize the benefit not only to the urban communities within our state, but also the rural areas which make up roughly 97% of Wisconsin's land area. Many of these areas continue to struggle with what will soon be unsustainable shortages of volunteer emergency responders. By regionalizing the provision of these services under this proposed model, these rural areas will benefit from the ability to share their limited numbers of volunteer response personnel beyond existing jurisdictional lines, as well as explore different staffing and deployment models as a benefit of the improved distribution and concentration of resources. With that, we believe that this legislation could be an essential component in preserving the ability for our state's struggling volunteer and combination fire and emergency services agencies to provide protection and maintain public safety for their communities for years to come.

While this summary highlights some of the most relevant and prominent benefits associated with allowing for the formation of regionalized fire and emergency services districts under this proposed model, we recognize that it is a complex and perhaps intimidating issue for state and local government officials to consider. With that understanding, we extend an open invitation to any and all governing officials who wish to engage in continuing dialogue to ensure that a comprehensive, inclusive, and effective piece of legislation can be brought forth to ensure the taxpayers in the State of Wisconsin enjoy the quality of life our state prides itself on through enhanced public safety delivered in the most fiscally prudent manner possible. We thank you for your time.

We ask that you introduce and/or support this type of legislation.

