



EMS Day at the Capitol      April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## *Issue Paper: Tax Incentives to Recruit and Retain Emergency Responders*

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

### **Problem**

According to the Center for Workforce Development, volunteerism in the US has dropped by over 26.8% in the last 10 years. Core jobs traditionally performed by families for generations—like farming, firefighting, and EMS—are seeing devastating losses to their volunteer workforce. Add to that an aging population with significantly increased need for healthcare, the tasks and responsibilities managed by volunteer Emergency Medical Services continue to suffer.

Recruiting and retaining volunteers are two of the toughest challenges facing the EMS industry. Nearly 70 percent of EMS responders in the U.S. are volunteers, responding to emergencies of all kinds. Over 80 percent of all EMS/Fire emergencies are handled by volunteers in Wisconsin.

The cost to become a volunteer First Responder breaks down like this:

- Wisconsin Technical College training      \$1,200
- NREMT Exam      \$80
- Est. Continuing Education      \$400/annually
- Uniform and Personal Gear      \$350

A mix of long-term stagnant or declining reimbursements, other limited financial support and changes to the societal view of volunteerism have negatively impacted EMS throughout our state. The changing dynamics of family units and the economic challenges these families face have also impacted staffing of EMS services. Rising inflation has forced many EMS providers to take on multiple jobs.

A lack of funding to support initial training and continuing education to maintain their EMS provider license also causes many to leave the service, or not to enter it at all. Emergency responders protect the infrastructure of our community during a fire, storm, hazardous material release and heavy rescue situations.

The number of volunteers in our state has declined over 12 percent in the past three decades **while the call volume has nearly tripled**. At the same time, the average age of the volunteer EMS responder is increasing. It is critical for the safety of our communities and our nation that we continue to have a strong volunteer EMS service now and in the future.

## Solution

We ask for support on the creation of modern state tax incentives in order to promote the retention of volunteer EMS personnel.

**There are two proposed bills that would address tax incentives for First Responders.** The first bill proposal LRB 2191 creates a refundable tax credit for volunteer fire fighters, emergency medical responders, and emergency medical services practitioners. The credit is equal to \$300 for volunteers who have served for at least five years, but not more than nine years, and \$600 for volunteers who have served for at least ten years. An individual is eligible to claim the credit if the individual is in good standing with the department for which he or she serves and has either completed 360 hours of training and participation, or participated in at least 50 percent of the calls or incidents that his or her department has responded to during the taxable year. In addition, b. No claimant who is 65 years of age or older on January 1 of the taxable year for which the claim relates may claim the credit.

The second bill proposal LRB 0977 This bill creates two nonrefundable individual income tax credits for volunteer fire fighters, emergency medical responders, and emergency medical services practitioners. The first credit equals \$20 for each hour an individual who volunteers for one of these positions spends on active duty, in training exercises, or in class completing coursework to improve skills or to obtain or maintain certification. The second credit equals the volunteer's unreimbursed expenses for purchasing gear and equipment plus an amount to reimburse him or her for using a personal vehicle to attend training. The maximum amount an individual may claim per year is \$1,000 for the first credit and \$400 for the second credit, except that these amounts are doubled for an individual who serves as a volunteer fire fighter and a volunteer emergency medical responder or services practitioner. Because the credits are nonrefundable, no amount will be paid to the claimant if the credit he or she is due exceeds his or her tax liability. The credits are only available to full-year Wisconsin residents.

**We ask that you support these modest incentives to help encourage recruitment and retention of EMS efforts in Wisconsin.**

