



North Dakota Firefighter's Association
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record my name is Robert Knuth and I am the Training Director of the North Dakota Firefighter's Association. I would like to voice my support to House Bill 1010, as amended and presented by the Insurance Commissioner.

As listed in ND Century Code chapter 18-03, it is the responsibility of the North Dakota Firefighter's Association (NDFA) to develop and adopt a statewide fire education and training plan; coordinate fire service training at all levels; and establish procedures to govern the certification process for firefighter training. As we are a non-profit, educational 501(c)(3) organization, NDFA relies heavily on these funds, as does every fire department. All organized fire departments across the state belong to the North Dakota Firefighter's Association. The Association is required to host an annual fire school as well as offer regional fire schools giving firefighters an opportunity to practice old skills and learn new skills that are required for the ever-changing demands placed on them.

In previous years, I have stood before you and testified that the NDFA has seen a decline in grant funding which funds most of our training that we provide. These trainings were, and hopefully will continue to be, offered for absolutely zero cost to our member fire departments. This year however, I am standing in front of you to testify that we have now lost our primary federal grant funding which provided \$560,000 over the past 4 years.

In October of 2016 NDFA was awarded a competitive Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant from FEMA to establish a firefighter recruitment and retention program. This grant included \$560,000.00 for instructor cost and to purchase training books for firefighter training and certification. These funds were separated into incremental amounts each year and covered training costs that NDFA was not previously funded for.

A portion of these funds were dedicated to purchasing training manuals for firefighters and departments to use during training. Any funds not utilized were forwarded to the next year or transferred by FEMA to be used for instructor and evaluator costs. Below is the yearly breakdown of these grant funds:

Award year	Awarded Amount	Amount Utilized
2016/2017	\$50,000	\$61,887.17
2018	\$55,000	\$28,053.38
2019	\$60,000	\$39,034.58
2020	\$65,000	\$58,663.89
\$230,000.00	\$187,639.02	Difference \$42,360.98

NDFA also received the following amounts to cover the cost of instructors/evaluators. Excess cost would be covered by transferring excess funds from the Training Manual line of the SAFER grant. Below is the yearly breakdown of these grant funds:

Award year	Awarded Amount	Amount Utilized
2016/2017	\$75,000	\$89,891.41
2018	\$80,000	\$93,621.02
2019	\$85,000	\$88,697.22
2020	\$90,000	\$72,962.46
\$330,000	\$345,172.11	Difference -\$15,172.11



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Over this four year period, using only these funds, NDFA trained 1086 students in basic firefighter skills; 3,396 students auto extrication certification or recertification; held 15 individual academies which allowed 328 students that were unable to receive certification training in their own departments, the opportunity to receive training and certification, and we administered certification testing which resulted in 1,036 students receiving a nationally recognized certification. However, receiving certification, especially firefighter I, doesn't mean someone is fully trained. It is the foundation to build upon as they further their career. They must continue their training as the fire service, like many other career fields, is always evolving.

NDFA was also able to provide 170 departments a total of 2639 technical training manuals totaling over \$187,000.00 at zero cost to firefighters and departments. As you would agree, the loss of this funding is a major impact to not only the NDFA but to all fire departments in the state. Without these funds NDFA would be forced to charge for these services putting more of a financial burden on the fire departments. More worrisome is the chance that many fire departments would be unable to receive this training due to the expense which could lead to depleting emergency response capabilities in their local communities putting themselves and the public at a greater risk.

Each year preceding a regular session of the legislative assembly, NDFA submits an itemized budget to the office of management and budget requesting "the amount of money necessary to promote the efficiency and growth of the different fire departments and fire protection districts of the association and to conduct the fire schools to be held during the succeeding biennium under the direction of the association". Each year NDFA submits a report to the OMB showing the disposition of all money received. And finally, NDFA has an audit conducted by a licensed public accountant annually which is submitted to the state auditor's office. These actions fulfill the financial accountability requirements identified in century code Chapter 18-03, sections 05 and 08.

As per the above-mentioned sections, in July of 2020, the NDFA submitted our budget to OMB and to the Office of the Insurance Commissioner. According to an agreement between the ND Fire Chief's and the NDFA in 2017, this budget was based off 5.5% of the Insurance Tax Distribution fund collected in 2019. This amount would account for the loss of federal funding and allow the NDFA to continue providing trainings, certification testing, and technical training manuals at zero cost to the departments.

In closing I wish to thank the committee for allowing me to present this testimony and again voice our support of House Bill 1010 as presented by the Insurance Commissioner and would welcome the chance to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.