

SB 2340
House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Good Morning Chairman Porter and House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, My Name is John Hejl and I am the fire chief in Casselton ND.

Casselton Fire is 100% volunteer. This fire department provides fire protection for the cities of Casselton and Amenia as well as 12 townships in the surrounding area. This primary fire coverage area is 385 square miles and covers just over 4,500 North Dakotans. Not every fire department in North Dakota provides extrication; many of our neighboring departments do not. We are dispatched out automatically if extrication is needed for a number of our neighboring departments bringing our total extrication zone up to 745 square miles. The Insurance Services Organization has given us an ISO score of 4 putting us in the top 1% of fire departments in North Dakota when it comes to preparedness and proven efficiency.

Volunteer and Career departments across the state pull funding from a variety of sources; grants, taxes, general funds of cities and townships, a statewide insurance rider and of course donations and fundraisers. Those funding sources should mirror their uses. Career or volunteer, metro or rural you will be hard pressed to find two identical departments. At Casselton Fire roughly 1/3 of our call volume comes from Casselton, 1/3 from our rural addresses, and 1/3 from Interstate 94 of which we cover 33 Miles; from Mapleton to Tower City. The Interstate and the State Highways that run through our area make us focus on extrication and dealing with hazardous situations and substances that would otherwise not be an issue in our area.

Fairly regularly the fire service becomes a catch all for emergency response. We take pride in calling ourselves an "all response agency". If a problem doesn't involve medical treatment or law enforcement issues, we as a service are called upon and expected to have the answers. We are regularly called upon for medical and law enforcement issues as well. While giving an address in Casselton many years ago, then Governor Dalrymple stated that when growing up if someone had a problem and didn't know what to do; he was told to call the fire department because they can handle anything. This means that our largely volunteer fire service is expected to be prepared for water rescue, body removal, extrication, hazardous materials response, rail response, technical rescues, medical responses, and don't forget actual fires – structural and wildland. Regionally and locally departments across the state prioritize training hours based upon their location. Terrain, population density, industry and infrastructure play a large role in what we purchase and train for. The needs and priorities of our fire service will be different from one department to the next and one region to the next.

Planning and being prepared for the unforeseen emergencies of an entire state is a large task. Much like eating an elephant; we need to start one bite at a time. Every department will have slightly different priorities, areas of focus, and scope of service. Paired regionally,

departments complement each other best when a base level of training is set and parameters of coordination and authority are agreed upon beforehand to ensure an effective response when assistance is requested. A study of current plans, infrastructure, and levels of preparedness will help our state's emergency responders find cracks in our current system and better prepare and prioritize for our future.

Please help the fire service in our great state so that we can better serve our citizens.

If you have further questions please reach out at any time.

Thank You

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