

HB 1508

10MAR23

Jason Asche

I am Jason Asche, a resident of Sargent County and Chair of the Gwinner Fire District (GFD) Board. I am offering my support as well as the GFD Board and Members support for HB1508. Mr. Waswick who is also a GFD member has written testimony for this bill and I am in full agreement with his testimony.

Without getting into every detail of the GFD audit I will break it down into three simple concerns:

1. GFD audit initiated by "concerned citizen". Who checks into the validity of the concerns? Why is there no documentation of the concerns? Shouldn't there be an opportunity to provide feedback to those concerns prior to engaging in an expensive audit?
2. Billing for Auditor fees. Fire Departments don't budget for fees charged by the SAO and can't afford to pay them. They are paid by forfeiting the purchase of equipment needed to fight fires in our community making them less safe. 166 Audit Hours were spent at a cost of \$17928.50. This was adjusted to \$11000 when there were questions raised about the charges.
3. No direction from SAO to address findings from audit. GFD had a separate checking account for fund raising and money was spent out of that account for meeting expenses which was determined by SAO to be against century code. GFD asked for suggestions on how to resolve but was never given any direction nor was any resource offered to address this finding.

The SAO should be focused on providing value for the citizens of North Dakota. Unfortunately, the citizens of the Gwinner Fire District were provided with **negative** value by SAO and are not better off. In fact, our district will be less safe because money collected by taxpayers was diverted to the SAO instead of being spent on GFD resources.

HB 1508 doesn't address all the above concerns at last reading but it is a step in the right direction. Maybe it can be amended to address more of the problems caused by the SAO that have unfortunately become very common across North Dakota. Please vote to pass HB 1508.