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## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Thursday, October 23, 2025  
Roughrider Room, State Capitol  
Bismarck, North Dakota

Representative Jim Grueneich, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

**Members present:** Representatives Jim Grueneich, Jayme Davis, Clayton Fegley, Pat D. Heinert, Dawson Holle, Karen Karls, Donald W. Longmuir, Dennis Nehring, Todd Porter; Senators Greg Kessel, Diane Larson, Dale Patten, Donald Schaible

**Member absent:** Senator Josh Bosch

**Others present:** Rebecca Fricke, North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System; Mark Reinhart\*, NDW Software, LLC; Rick Schreiber, Arnegard Fire Department; Wayde Sick, Department of Career and Technical Education; Kim Stanley\*, Steve Wirth\*, and Matt Zavadsky\*, PWW Advisory Group  
See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

*\*Attended remotely*

**It was moved by Senator Schaible, seconded by Representative Karls, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the August 20, 2025, meeting be approved as distributed.**

### **VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY RESPONDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STUDY**

Mr. Doug Nelson, State Fire Marshal, Insurance Department, presented information ([Appendix B](#)) requested by the committee regarding fire departments in the state. He noted:

- The State Fire Marshal's office collaborated with the Insurance Department and the Insurance Services office to reduce the number of fire departments and districts classified as a Class 10, the lowest class, from 73 to less than 20.

- Firefighter benefits include:

Disability benefits for full-time paid firefighters under presumptive disability laws if certain conditions are met.

Pension benefits for firefighters employed by the state or a political subdivision under the public safety pension plan through the North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System (PERS).

Eligibility for red volunteer emergency responder license plates. Red license plates serve as an entrance pass to all North Dakota state parks.

Death benefits for the family of a firefighter who dies in the line of duty.

Ms. Rebecca Fricke, Executive Director, North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System, presented information regarding volunteer emergency responder retirement and insurance benefits. She noted:

- Retirement, insurance, and ancillary benefits administered through PERS are classified by the federal government as governmental plans and to maintain governmental plan status, only

government employees may be covered.

- Volunteer emergency responders are not government employees.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. Fricke noted:

- To qualify as a permanent employee for benefits, an individual must work at least 20 hours per week for 20 or more weeks of the year in a permanent, regularly funded position.
- The threshold increases to 32 hours per week for 20 weeks or more per year for a firefighter with an employer participating in the state public safety plan.

Mr. Jonathan Hildremyr, Training Director, North Dakota Firefighter's Association, presented information ([Appendix C](#)) regarding volunteer firefighter training programs. He noted:

- The North Dakota Firefighter's Association (NDFA) programs align with National Fire Protection Association standards, ensuring North Dakota firefighters are trained and certified to a national standard.
- NDFA offers a range of training events including state, regional, and department level training and certification courses.
- There are two levels of firefighter certification and the NDFA will be adding additional levels and standards to expand its certification portfolio.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Hildremyr noted:

- There are two postsecondary firefighting programs in North Dakota, one at Dickinson State University and one at North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) in Wahpeton.
- Over the last 3 years, the number of participants at training and certification events has increased.

Mr. Chris Demello Rice, Certification Director, North Dakota Firefighter's Association, presented information regarding volunteer firefighter training. He noted the NDFA is accredited by the National Professional Qualifications Board and the association will be expanding its certification portfolio.

Mr. Tim Wahlin, Chief of Injury Services, Workforce Safety and Insurance, presented information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding insurance benefits for volunteer emergency responders. He noted:

- North Dakota law provides for payment of medical benefits, indemnity benefits, including death benefits and postretirement payments, and permanent partial impairment benefits.
- Temporary total disability are tax-free benefits consisting of two-thirds of the pre-injury gross weekly wage, plus \$15 per week for each dependent child.
- Permanent total disability benefits are for injuries resulting in permanent total disability and are equal to the temporary total disability benefits plus an annual cost-of-living adjustment, and terminate at the time of presumed retirement.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Wahlin noted the benefits paid to an injured volunteer depends on the volunteer's amount of covered income.

Mr. Wayde Sick, Director and Executive Officer, Department of Career and Technical Education, presented information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding education programs for emergency responders. He noted:

- Dickinson State University is offering an associates in applied science degree in fire science. Eight students are enrolled in the program, which takes approximately 2 years to complete and consists of both coursework and practical training.
- NDSCS has 7 students enrolled and a goal to increase enrollment to 12 next semester and 15 the following year. Fifteen applications have been received for the next semester.

- Postsecondary emergency medical service programs are offered at Bismarck State College, Lake Region State College, Dakota College at Bottineau, Turtle Mountain Community College, and NDSCS.

Mr. Matt Clark, Fire Chief, Williston Fire Department, provided comments regarding volunteer firefighter training programs. He noted the Williston Fire Department has employees providing training in conjunction with the Williston Career and Technical Education Program.

### **FIRE SERVICE REGIONAL RESPONSE MODEL STUDY**

Mr. Casey Orvedal, Counsel, Legislative Council, presented a memorandum entitled [\*Evolving Fire Service Operational and Response Needs Study - Background Memorandum\*](#).

Mr. Nelson presented information ([Appendix B](#)) regarding the fire service operational and response needs of the state. He noted:

- The State Fire Marshal's office consists of 10 staff distributed throughout the state.
- Deputy fire marshals are located in Fargo, Jamestown, Bismarck, Dickinson, Minot, Devils Lake, and Grand Forks.
- The State Fire Marshal's office has been unable to fill an eighth deputy fire marshal position due to a noncompetitive salary.
- The State Fire Marshal's office has partnered with federal, state, and local agencies on fire investigations, fire inspections, and community risk reduction.

Mr. Darin Hanson, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Director, Department of Emergency Services, presented information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding the fire service operational and response needs of the state. He noted:

- The Department of Emergency Services (DES) preparedness activities include constant monitoring through the ND Watch Center. Through the watch center, DES coordinates fire danger intelligence and disseminates information to other agencies through the Joint Information Center.
- DES has partnered with the North Dakota National Guard, Forest Service, and Bismarck State College on establishing additional red card training.
- DES conducts after action reviews following every significant event and exercise.
- The DES watch center coordinates with the National Weather Service for early detection of extreme weather events.
- A significant challenge impacting small-sized jurisdictions is the local emergency manager often is not a full-time role and the lack of requirements in statute to define the requirements of an emergency management program.
- Reduction of federal grant funding is a concern for local emergency management.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Hanson noted:

- DES maintains an inventory of resources from private sector vendors for dispatch to local jurisdictions during a disaster event.
- DES has partnered with the Department of Water Resources in creating a virtual map illustrating water access points throughout the state for emergency response.

Mr. Thomas Claeys, State Forester, North Dakota Forest Service, presented information ([Appendix G](#)) regarding the fire service operational and response needs of the state. He noted:

- The state General Fund allocation to the North Dakota Forest Service (NDFS) is approximately \$270,000 per year which pays for two full-time firefighters and one administrative position.

- Other NDFS assets are supported by special funds, including 6 full-time firefighters, 12 seasonal firefighters, 5 fire engines, and 3 fire equipped all-terrain vehicles.

Mr. Ryan Melin, Fire Management Officer, North Dakota Forest Service, presented information regarding the fire service operational and response needs of the state. He noted:

- NDFS completed trainings for 319 firefighters in 2023, 430 firefighters in 2024, and 466 firefighters to date in 2025, with several training courses scheduled for this fall.
- In 2024, NDFS received 43 project requests from North Dakota fire departments for a total request of \$395,056 in cooperative fire protection assistance grants. The NDFS awarded 36 projects for a total of \$364,866.

Mr. Rick Schreiber, Fire Chief, Arnegard Fire Department, provided comments regarding the local response to the October 2024 wildfires.

Mr. Hildremyr presented information regarding the fire service training needs of the state and he noted NDFA is working with NDFS to become accredited to offer wildland firefighter certifications.

Mr. Demello Rice presented information regarding the fire service training needs of the state. He noted:

- Approximately 96 percent of North Dakota firefighters are volunteers, and traveling to a centralized training academy is typically not feasible.
- The NDFA operates a mobile training organization that brings training directly to local departments.
- Regional programs have helped build relationships among neighboring departments, creating more effective mutual aid coordination.

### **DELINQUENT BILLING REIMBURSEMENT GRANT SYSTEM FOR AMBULANCE SERVICE PROVIDERS STUDY**

Mr. Keith Mantz, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Council, presented a memorandum entitled [Ambulance Service Provider Delinquent Billing Reimbursement Grants](#).

Mr. John Arnold, Deputy Commissioner, Insurance Department, provided information regarding the delinquent billing reimbursement study. He noted:

- Less than one-third of North Dakotans are covered by insurance plans the Insurance Department regulates and the department does not regulate self-funded plans or federal plans.
- The department has absorbed the Securities Commission and the State Fire Marshal's office, taking on additional administrative work without increases in personnel.
- The department also is establishing a pharmacy benefit manager regulatory division, and more resources may be needed to ensure operational continuity across all program areas.

Mr. Orvedal presented a memorandum entitled [Request For Proposals And Proposal Responses - Delinquent Billing Reimbursement](#).

Mr. Mark Reinhart, Project Director, NDW Software, LLC, presented information ([Appendix H](#)) regarding the proposal ([Appendix I](#)) submitted in response to the request for proposals for delinquent billing reimbursement consulting services. He noted:

- If selected for the project, NDW Software, LLC would begin by assembling a statewide task force and researching actions taken by other states to address delinquent billing reimbursement.
- The study would commence in early November 2025 and a comprehensive written report summarizing the study's findings, analysis, and recommendations would be presented to the committee by February 2026.

Mr. Matt Zavadsky, Emergency Management Services and Mobile Healthcare Consultant, Mr. Steve Wirth, Emergency Management Services and Mobile Healthcare Attorney, and Kim Stanley, Emergency Management Services Consultant, PWW Advisory Group, presented information ([Appendix J](#)) regarding the proposal ([Appendix K](#)) submitted in response to the request for proposals for delinquent billing reimbursement consulting services. They noted:

- PWW Advisory Group has developed a template to assist organizations in reporting data relevant to the project.
- The final analysis will identify key findings, and provide recommendations to address the findings, and, if appropriate, propose a delinquent billing reimbursement grant program for ambulance service providers, including criteria to consider as part of determining grant amounts.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Arnold noted a majority of insurance plans are not regulated by the Insurance Department and are instead regulated by the federal government.

### COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIVES

**It was moved by Representative Heinert, seconded by Representative Holle, and carried on a roll call vote that the committee recommend the Chairman of the Legislative Management contract with PWW Advisory Group to provide consultant services related to the delinquent billing reimbursement study.** Representatives Grueneich, Davis, Fegley, Heinert, Holle, Karls, Longmuir, and Nehring and Senators Kessel, Larson, and Patten voted "aye." No negative votes were cast.

**It was moved by Representative Heinert, seconded by Chairman Grueneich, and carried on a roll call vote that the Legislative Council staff be directed to research through the use of the National Conference of State Legislatures how other states handle retirement benefits for volunteer firefighters.** Representatives Grueneich, Davis, Fegley, Heinert, Holle, Karls, Longmuir, and Nehring and Senators Kessel, Larson, and Patten voted "aye." No negative votes were cast.

**It was moved by Representative Longmuir, seconded by Representative Davis, and carried on a roll call vote that the committee request the Chairman of the Legislative Management to allocate funds for consultant services for the fire regional response model study.** Representatives Grueneich, Davis, Fegley, Holle, Karls, Longmuir, and Nehring and Senators Larson and Patten voted "aye." No negative votes were cast.

No further business appearing, Chairman Grueneich adjourned the meeting at 4:15 p.m.

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Casey Orvedal  
Counsel

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Keith Mantz  
Fiscal Analyst

ATTACH:11