



January 30th, 2025

House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: Support for HB 1419

Chairman Schauer and Committee Members,

My name is Corey Johnson, and I serve the City of Williston as the Assistant Chief of Operations and a Paramedic for their Fire & Ambulance Department. I am here today in support of HB 1419.

The ND Public Employees Retirement System has a special program entitled the Public Safety Retirement Plan. When you think of the term Public Safety, do you think about EMTs, Paramedics, and dispatchers? I hope that you do. With over 18 years of experience providing public safety services, including firefighting and emergency medical services, I can tell you that Public Safety is a team effort that includes Law Enforcement, Firefighters, EMS providers, and our 9-1-1 dispatchers. The very name of this retirement program is fitting for the additions provided in this bill.

As a licensed Paramedic who has worked for both independent and fire-based EMS agencies, I can tell you that the physical demands and mental stress associated with this job classification are significant. Our EMS providers are constantly under physical stress that takes a lasting toll on their bodies. Nearly every call for service involves lifting and moving patients. This can range from loading the stretcher into the back of an ambulance to carrying someone down three flights of stairs of an apartment building. The very life-saving procedures we perform are physically demanding, such as performing CPR for extended durations in some of the more rural parts of our service areas. EMS providers do not just provide patient care and transport. EMS providers often perform rescue services, with many specializing in auto extrication, rope rescue, confined space rescue, and hazardous materials response. In addition to these physical demands, which I have only highlighted a small portion, we must also consider the mental stress of the job. EMS providers and dispatchers face a tremendous amount of mental stress and have a significant risk of developing serious mental health illnesses. EMS is often a rewarding career, but it doesn't come without its challenges. We see and experience what no

one should ever experience. All while working long hours, often with little sleep from demanding schedules and high call volumes.

Last year, my department responded to 5,902 calls for service. These calls range from structure fires, wildfires, motor vehicle accidents, and medical calls, to name a few. This number is significant and continues to grow every year. The most interesting part of our call volume statistics is the breakdown of fire-based calls versus EMS-related calls. On average, 82% of our call volume is EMS-related. I can't speak for other communities, but I imagine you would find a similar comparison if you reviewed fire-related calls to EMS.

I've listened in and participated in several hearings during this legislative session on various EMS-related issues. This assembly is well aware of the many challenges facing ambulance services across our state, one of the most significant being recruitment and retention. I have no doubt that passing this bill will significantly and positively impact our recruitment and retention efforts across the state. As public servants, we are often asked to do our work for less. In our state's NW Region, competing with the many private sector jobs that offer significantly better wages is incredibly difficult. Short of providing wages that compete with the public sector, our best strategy is through benefits.

The Williston Fire Department's call volume and response model continues to grow. As a combination fire and ambulance department, we operate a cross-staffing model that works well today. Our staff must be dually qualified and certified as firefighters and EMS providers. As our EMS call volume grows, the demand for dedicated EMS units that do not have firefighting responsibilities increases. If the time comes for us to make this staffing adjustment, there will be a significant discrepancy in the level of benefits offered for a job that arguably shares the same, if not more, physical and mental demands.

I ask for your support in recommending HB 1419 as a "do pass."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Corey A. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Corey A. Johnson, B.S.
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