



March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Senate State and Local Government Committee  
600 East Boulevard Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: Support for HB 1419

Chairman Roers 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 to express our strong support for HB 1419. We all know the many challenges affecting public safety services, especially those impacting our Emergency Medical Services system. HB 1419 brings forward a targeted solution to improve recruitment and retention and the health and safety of our emergency responders by creating a pathway for our public EMS providers and 9-1-1 dispatchers to join the ND PERS Public Safety Plan.

When you think of Public Safety, do you think of EMTs, Paramedics, and 9-1-1 Dispatchers? I hope that you do. With over 18 years of experience providing public safety services, including firefighting and EMS, 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 fits 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 9-1-1 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. 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.

Being an EMT, Paramedic, or 9-1-1 dispatcher is not simple. In addition to the physical and mental stress of the job, performing this job adequately requires a significant commitment to training. We are lifelong learners who must continuously adapt to evolving technology and tactics. Having staff with experience is critically important to accomplishing our tasks safely and creating positive patient outcomes while ensuring that everyone goes home to their families. Having adequate benefits matching job demands is critical to recruitment and retention.

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. When 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,



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