

House Appropriations Committee

House Bill 1010

By Shawn Weltikol

January 13, 2021

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Shawn Weltikol, Fire Chief of the Devils Lake Rural Fire Department and the current President of the North Dakota Fire Chief's Association.

I am requesting your support of House Bill 1010, in particular the distribution of the Insurance premium tax funds, and the continuing appropriations to the fire service. Fire departments across the state depend on these funds to keep their departments operating year to year. The equipment necessary to provide the best protection for firefighters who are willing to risk their lives to save members of our communities is expensive and has a life cycle. Maintenance, training, and yearly operating costs continue to go up. All of these items are necessary to ensure that our communities have a fire department that is prepared and able to respond when they call.

Since I am intimately involved in the operation of a fire department I would like to give you a quick look at the funding of the Devils Lake Rural Fire Department. Our department's annual operating budget is \$155,000 which includes \$120,000 from the mill levy and \$45,000 from the Insurance Premium Tax. During previous years our Premium Tax check was \$35,000. In the last session the fire service was awarded 100 percent of the Premium Tax with 94.5 percent going to fire departments and 5.5 percent going to the NDFA. The added \$10,000 allowed us to perform some much needed upgrades to our equipment, such as new hydrant valves, drip torches, and gas meters.

I believe that returning 100% of the Insurance Premium Tax, as suggested in the North Dakota State Auditors Report of the North Dakota Insurance Department, as well as a continuing appropriations of the Insurance Premium Tax is essential to the fire service and the safety of all Firefighters in North Dakota. If fire departments were to receive all of the funds collected, it is probable that a number of the fire departments across the state could decrease their ISO rating, thus reducing the cost of insurance premiums.

Thank you for your consideration in making the Insurance Premium Tax a continuing appropriation in House Bill 1010. I am available for any questions that you may have.