

Testimony to the House Appropriations - Government Operations Division, Jan 13, 2021, Bismarck, ND.

Given by Robert Knuth, Training Director, North Dakota Firefighter's Association.

Good Afternoon Chairman Vigesaa and members of the Appropriations - Government Operations Division. My name is Rob Knuth and I am the Training Director for the North Dakota Firefighter's Association. I stand before you today in support of House Bill 1010 as well as the previous testimony heard from the Insurance Commissioner and the ND Fire Chief's Association.

As listed in ND Century Code chapter 18-03, it is our responsibility to develop and adopt a statewide fire education and training plan; coordinate fire service training at all levels; and establish procedures to govern the certification process for firefighter training. As we are a non-profit, educational 501(c)(3) organization, NDFA relies heavily on these funds, as does every fire department. All organized fire departments across the state belong to the North Dakota Firefighter's Association. The Association hosts an annual fire school and offers regional fire schools giving firefighters an opportunity to practice old skills and learn new skills that are required for the ever-changing demands placed on them.

In previous years I have stood before you and testified that the North Dakota Firefighter's Association has seen a decline in grant funding which funds most of our training that we provide. These trainings were, and hopefully will continue to be, offered for absolutely zero cost to our member fire departments. This year however, I am standing in front of you to testify that we have now lost our primary federal grant funding which provided over \$550,000 over the past 4 years. These funds were part of the FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, or SAFER, grant that we received in November of 2016. Each year NDFA was able to request reimbursement for funds we utilized for putting on training classes, providing certifications, and providing training material to departments and firefighters.

Over these past four years the classes we utilized these funds for:

- trained 1086 students in basic firefighter skills;
- allowed 3,396 students to receive auto extrication certification or recertification;
- allowed 328 students to graduate with a certification from one of our Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, or Hazardous Materials Operations academies;
- It funded all our individual certification test sites which certified
 - 460 new Firefighter I,
 - 296 Firefighter II,
 - 280 Hazardous Materials Operations personnel.

Also, over these four years the NDFA was able to provide 170 departments a total of 2639 technical training manuals totaling over \$187,000.00 all at zero cost to firefighters and departments. As you would agree, the loss of this funding is a major impact to not only the NDFA but to all fire departments in the state.

In July of 2020, the NDFA submitted our budget to the Office of Management and Budget and to the Office of the Insurance Commissioner as required by Century Code. This budget was based off 5.5% of the Insurance Tax Distribution fund collected in 2019. We strongly feel that if this amount is approved the NDFA will be able to continue providing the trainings, certification testing, and technical training manuals at zero cost to the departments.

In closing I wish to thank the committee for allowing me to present this testimony and again voice our support of House Bill 1010 as presented by the Insurance Commissioner and would welcome the chance to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.