

Senate Appropriations Committee

House Bill 1010

By Shawn Weltikol

March 4, 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 Chiefs Association.

I am requesting your support on House Bill 1010, in particular the distribution of the Insurance premium tax funds, and the continuing appropriations of these tax funds back to the local communities and their respective fire department. The 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 increase. All of these items are necessary to ensure that our communities have a fire department that is prepared to respond when needed.

I would like to give you a quick history on the Insurance premium tax and the Devils Lake Rural Fire Department's budget and how they tie together. The insurance premium tax check that the Devils Lake Rural Fire Department received in 2019 was \$34,000, in 2020 the check was \$48,000, the added \$14,000 allowed us to replace a brush truck with the help of a grant. Without the added monies we would have had to take funds out of other accounts slated for PPE or pump testing and maintenance. However, the

\$48,000 that was received was not the full one hundred percent that was awarded last session. Passing the continuing appropriations this will ensure that the full amount collected will return to the fire departments in North Dakota. Roughly \$1.9 million dollars went to the general fund that should have went to the fire departments.

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 possible that a number of the fire departments across the state could decrease their ISO rating, thus reducing the cost of insurance premiums within their respective communities.

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.