

SB 2211  
Senate Appropriations Committee

Chairman Holmberg and Members of the Appropriations Committee

My name is John Hejl; I am the fire chief in Casselton, ND, and I am writing this letter in support of SB 2211.

Each year roughly 1/3 of Casselton Fire Department's budget is comprised of our state insurance rebate. I say roughly because in some years in the past we have not received 100% of our fire insurance premium tax revenue collected. The low point was 48% of these funds collected being paid out to fire departments. This tax revenue has been explained to me as a pass-through fund, whereby the state collects the tax and passes that collection on to the fire departments. This fund was a continuing appropriation from 1887 – 1985. Since 1985, funding to the fire departments has fluctuated between 101% of the funds to as low as the aforementioned 48% of the funds available. These funds are used by fire departments to keep citizens safe and to lower their insurance premiums through the ISO rating system. Senate Bill 2211 is asking that the continuing appropriation be restored; this ensures that the dollars that are intended to go to the fire departments are going to those departments.

The past uncertainty in our funding from the fire insurance premium and the fact that it is not yet a continuing appropriation makes it all the more difficult for Casselton Fire and many other fire departments throughout the state to properly budget, plan for, and meet our current and future needs. As an example; currently at Casselton Fire we are waiting to place an order for a rescue truck to replace our current rescue that is a 1991 model. Like many other industries, the longer we wait, the more expensive materials and labor become and the further our build dates get pushed out. We are waiting because we do not know if we will be receiving 100% of this funding source or any number less for the next two years. We have put in the time to spec many different options for this apparatus to meet the needs of our citizens, but will not be able to make a final purchase order until the legislature has decided at what level and for how long our funding will be.

Please recommend a do pass for SB 2211 so that we as a fire service can have a little more certainty in our budgeting process for our personnel, apparatus, tool, PPE, and training needs.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of SB2211. I welcome any questions you might have

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