



January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023

North Dakota Firefighters Association  
North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office

RE: Support for SB-2211

Chairman and Committee Members

I am Matt Clark, Fire Chief for the City of Williston, Williston Fire Department. I also represent the Williston Volunteer Fire Department. On behalf of our department, I stand before you in support of SB 2211 and to discuss the financial impacts facing emergency services in North Dakota.

Our state's emergency services are facing unprecedented service costs and continually rising call volumes. The northwest region of North Dakota has continued to see annual calls for service increases of over ten percent. This past year our department saw an increase of 18 percent. Our call volume increased from 4,400 calls for service in 2021 to 5,200 calls for service in 2022. To meet the emergency service needs of communities, fire departments must have adequate staffing, equipment, and training. These requirements come at a cost and drastically impact the financial needs of fire departments around the state.

Inflation rates for fire service equipment range from five to 15 percent annually. To meet National Fire Protection Association and the Insurance Service Office's standards, it is upwards of \$30,000 per firefighter to outfit them with the required personal protective equipment. For a reference point, our department increased from 32 total staff to 120 staff over the last eight years

to meet the needs of our region. Additionally, this equipment must be replaced every ten years due to degradation and replacement standards.

The cost of fire apparatus continues to climb with semi-annual increases from most manufacturers. A 1-million-dollar price tag accompanies most fire apparatus. This is coupled with 36-month build times due to supply chain issues. Fire departments must order apparatus in advance and anticipate equipment lead times. The associated costs for services are necessary to meet our community needs and ensure our personnel have the appropriate safety equipment when responding to emergencies.

The need to meet minimum National Fire Protection Association standards comes as a benefit to fire departments and the communities they serve. Our region has seen the direct impact of improved efficiency and services based on our department's improvements. Our response times have reduced, our operational efficiency has improved, our property loss versus saved ratios have improved, and our overall rating from the Insurance Service Office improved from an ISO Class 5/8b to an ISO 2. This reduces the general insurance premiums for our residents and establishes the minimum fire protection measures available to our community.

Our department is an example of continued growth in our state and the need to support secured funding mechanisms for operational and capital expenses for emergency services. The complete return of the Insurance Premium Tax to fire departments, along with the efforts of the North Dakota Firefighters Association and the State Fire Marshal's office, will help our department adapt and continue to provide the level of service our communities deserve.

Matthew J. Clark

Fire Chief, Williston Fire Department  
of our department.