

Chairman and Committee Members

I am Ken Wangen Fire Chief for Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue and President of the North Dakota Fire Chiefs Association. I stand before you in support of SB 2211.

To give you a little background

I have been involved in Emergency Services since my teen years living in Goodrich ND but officially started my Volunteer Career with Killdeer Area Ambulance as a EMT and West Dunn Fire Protection District as a Firefighter in the early 90's. I carried on my volunteer service in both EMS and Fire when my family and I moved to Carrington 2001. In 2012 I was elected Fire Chief of Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue and in 2017 hung up my EMT and EMS Career (figuring 26 years was enough), but before the year was out obtained my EMR accreditation so I really did not retire from EMS duties.

Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue has 40 volunteer members that respond to an average of 60-70 calls a year. Our service area consists of approx. 530 square miles as primary Fire Protection and 960 square miles as primary Rescue and Extrication. Our members to be considered in good standing are required to have a minimum of 12 hours training per year (the department at a minimum offers 24 hours a year and averages closer to 50 with local classes offered by the NDFA) and be a minimum of CPR Certified. We also budget for 8 fire fighters a year to attend the State Fire School in Minot. We currently have 5 EMR's and 1 Paramedic on our roster. Those same people volunteer hours to attend business meeting, trainings, do truck checks, host celebration events within the city, maintain and clean trucks, provide instruction to our public schools 2 times a year to promote Fire and General Safety, work with our local Law Enforcement for National Night Out and Shop with a Hero (in some places known as shop with a cop), fund raising for the department and once a year host a benefit for someone local in need.

In my 22 years as a member of Carrington Fire and Rescue we have had search and rescues of varying nature (water recovery, overland search, Auto Extrication and Bin Rescue) with both positive and negative outcomes. For fires I am sad to say we have had fatalities due to fire and more than our share of arson cases. Along with that we have had incidents of Hazardous Material spills with multiple car train derailments in 2019 and 2020. We have had good saves of life, buildings, and property thankfully too many to list. Our volunteers, as do all Firefighters in the state need a wide array of training to properly service our protection areas. And our equipment must be constantly evaluated, repaired and or updated. Keep in mind we do this as volunteers with many other draws of our time.

We operate with 5 mil tax from the City of Carrington, Protection Contracts to the 13 surrounding townships, the Fire Insurance Premium Tax, Grants, Donations, reimbursement for service of extended time and Fund Raisers.

1. To give you an idea of cost we forecast in the coming years

- a. Replacement Pumper minimum \$500,000 without equipment, additional equipment \$200,000
- b. SIREN Radio Upgrade \$98,000 with approximately \$36,000 returned through State reimbursement
- c. Turnout replacement approx. \$3,000-4,000 per firefighter (10-year cycle)
- d. Upgrading to more efficient lights inside the fire hall at a cost of \$10,000 with a reimbursement of 50% through a federal grant.

Last session I served as VP of the North Dakota Fire Chiefs Association and was involved in the discussions that lead to the current agreement of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax Fund (a tax started to help Fire Departments in 1887). While the return of funds gathered in the name of the Fire Service has looked much better lately it is not completely ideal. While we understand that accountability and conversation is always needed. In that respect we have met every expectation and requirement set forth by the legislature (Certificate of Existence registration, Fire Premium Tax Fund usage reporting and Fire Reporting) this bill does nothing to change that those conversations happen in the future but would allow the focus to shift.