

2025 HOUSE POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS

HB 1311

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Political Subdivisions Committee Room JW327B, State Capitol

HB 1311
1/23/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study regarding volunteer emergency responder recruitment and retention.

2:28 p.m. Chairman Longmuir opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Longmuir, Vice-Chairman Fegley, Vice-Chairman Jonas, Representatives Bolinske, Hager, Hatlestad, Heilman, Klemin, Motschenbacher, Ostlie, Toman, Warrey

Members Absent: Representative Davis

Discussion Topics:

- Volunteer emergency responder compensation
- Local revenue funding volunteer responders
- Maintaining emergency responder equipment

2:29 p.m. Representative Bernie Satrom, North Dakota Representative for District 12, introduced the bill and testified in favor.

2:34 p.m. Travis Bateman, Director of Badlands Search and Rescue, testified in favor and provided testimony #30935.

2:44 p.m. Representative Hager moved a Do Pass.

2:44 p.m. Representative Hatlestad seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Clayton Fegley	Y
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Macy Bolinske	Y
Representative Jayme Davis	A
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	Y
Representative Lawrence R. Klemin	Y
Representative Mike Motschenbacher	Y
Representative Mitch Ostlie	Y
Representative Nathan Toman	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

2:46 p.m. Motion passed 12-0-1

2:46 p.m. Unanimous decision to be placed on the consent calendar.

2:46 p.m. Representative Hatlestad will carry the bill.

Additional written testimony:

Ken Wangen, Fire Chief for the Carrington Volunteer Fire Department, submitted testimony in favor #30909

Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association, submitted testimony in support #31010

2:47 p.m. Chairman Longmuir closed the hearing.

Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1311 ([25.0193.01000](#))

Political Subdivisions Committee (Rep. Longmuir, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** and **BE PLACED ON THE CONSENT CALENDAR** (12 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1311 was placed on the Tenth order on the calendar.

House Political Subdivision

Date 1/22/2025.

Testimony on House Bill 1311

Submitted by: Ken Wangen Fire Chief Carrington Fire Department

Chairman Longmuir and House Political Subdivision Committee members,

My name is Ken Wangen Chief of the Carrington Volunteer Fire Department and the current President of the North Dakota Fire Chiefs Association.

The last couple of years have exposed a lot of issues for the Rural Emergency Services. We are losing both Fire Departments and Ambulance services at an alarming rate.

Studying and finding solutions that would help recruit and retain volunteers makes a lot of sense. With the loss of services, it often puts more strain on the remaining surrounding services with no hope of increasing personnel or even funding to cover the added expense of larger response areas. This issue then leads to losses of personnel to the surviving services due to burnout. To also compounded the issue surviving services may have gaps in personnel during days or even seasons (springs work and harvest come to mind) and end up relying on surrounding services to also respond. The services that are able provide this without question but is still leads back to the issue mentioned before.

A comprehensive study is warranted and very much needed. While it may or may not be a funding related issue, I do believe it is a combination of personal time, expense, and frankly dwindling population.

Without a study we essentially will be status quo, which will mean continued loss of Emergency Service in areas we simply cannot afford to not have coverage.

Thank you for taking the time to review this testimony. And I ask you pass HB 1311 and help all Emergency Services try and find a solution.

Ken Wangen

Fire Chief Carrington Fire Department



TO: NORTH DAKOTA LEGISLATURE-69TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

RE: **TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HOUSE BILL 1311**

1/23/2025

Chairman Longmuir and committee members,

Good morning, my name is Travis Bateman and I represent the Badlands Search & Rescue Service along with the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of North Dakota. I submit to you this testimony in full support and in favor of House Bill 1311.

Volunteerism as a whole is on the decline and this is something that is impacting public safety and emergency services in North Dakota every day and every night. As society changes and the balance of work and life plays out, it is very obvious that communities will need to take a critical look at how these departments are to be staffed and remain able to provide the critical services that they do.

It is becoming more and more prevalent that the interest or dedication that younger members of our communities have is shifting. The idea to drop what they are doing at home or work to go and leave their family, leave work and miss out on their pay, drive their personal vehicle with personal fuel, and often times to then risk personal injury or death that the inherent duties ask of them just isn't enough.

What are we to do when there is nobody to answer the call? While the vast majority of our public safety teams are volunteer, they are still required to attain training and certifications on an annual or similar basis and then maintain those certifications through continued education. This means more time, more money, more ask of our volunteers.

Most members of our services only needed the incentive to help. That appears to be changing. More and more everything is coming down to monetary benefits or other incentives to attract and then keep them. We cannot simply drop training requirements to keep names on a roster. It doesn't do any good for an emergency to simply have someone that can drive a fire engine or ambulance to a scene. Then what? What good is that if the people with that vehicle aren't trained in the necessary skills and abilities to perform the tasks to standard and to do it safely?

We must find solutions in the near term as I fear that as the roster of members gets older and older that the risks and liabilities continue to mount. There already are departments having to close their doors or request mutual aid for many incidents that are otherwise routine due to not having enough trained and capable members. Ambulance services are having to rely on neighboring districts to respond to medical events. When seconds count, that has a very negative impact on the person waiting for help. Fire departments having to request mutual aid from the district next door are risking their personnel but also risking their home districts with extended response times, reduced staffing for an incident over all the districts involved, the extended response times, and after that, the incidental physical impacts of the volunteers that are now being taxed to handle more, with less.

I have witnessed personally, fire services responding and having one or two people show up in apparatus where they should, by standard, have no less than four people to adequately and safely handle an incident. Firefighters working solo on opposite sides of a structure fire. Or, one firefighter operating an engine, driving it, parking it, setting the hose line, charging the line and operating the pump, and then running to man the hose and apply water to flame. Can you imagine how unsafe all of that is?

There are solutions to the challenges faced. Some better than others. Some that are small in effort or deed, but impactful and of benefit to the person volunteering. We simply need to take an in-depth look to identify and implement them before we enter a more risky environment. Again, in many places here in North Dakota and across the nation, this is already present and happening.

North Dakota passed a bill a few years back that provides volunteer fire, EMS, SAR, and dive teams to have up to two vehicles registered free of charge and don red volunteer emergency responder license plates. Aside from that, there is no monetary incentive for people. Yet the costs to volunteer continue to mount. We pay for the fuel and operate our personal vehicles to respond to the station or directly to scene. We pay for the travel, food, fuel, motel, and training event costs many times. Sometimes the lodging, food, travel expenses, and training certification fees are funded through grant or other funds, but often times it falls squarely on the shoulders of the individual volunteer.

When it costs an individual more from their personal account to volunteer to help their community, that isn't seen as doable or even enjoyable to many nowadays. The economic impacts for the individual households are mounting and the current system in my mind is not sustainable in the long term.

Money can't be the only incentive however. Districts still need to maintain a standard of capable, trained, and professional volunteers. So, there exists a need to study and examine the overall readiness or capabilities that currently exist to identify and realize just how critical this already is. Many volunteers struggle to respond to the calls and meetings at home, let alone to go and attend training events to adequately ensure they know what to do and how to do it safely.

The same can be said for search and rescue volunteers even more as we train our members through our organization following national standards. However, we also operate our personal vehicles for everything, we don't have the ability to drive to a station and then respond with apparatus or an

ambulance. Our members also have to purchase their own gear, packs, food, and everything else to be self-sufficient in the field. This has been impactful for us on a negative front in all facets of volunteerism from time to cost to training standards. We have shifted our training program as much as possible between in persona and remote or by videocall and that still hasn't helped in retention. It always comes down to time as the reason someone can't continue to volunteer and commit.

Other states are in the same position or worse. North Dakota should certainly aim to get ahead of the issue and not continue down the path that we are on.

In many areas today, it takes two calls and resources are maxed out. Typically that is first with the number of volunteers available and then the number of apparatus sufficient for the call. Then we request help from the agency next door and the domino effect continues and readiness falters over a larger and larger geographical area.

The solutions to the volunteer dilemma exist, it simply needs to be looked at in depth, from a statewide standpoint to gather all of the components involved, identify needs and incentives, and then to formulate a system of implementation. But we need a study to gather all of that from every corner of our state first.

Please recommend a DO PASS for HB 1311.

Thank you and I am available for any questions that you may have.

Respectfully,

Travis F. Bateman

Travis F. Bateman
Director / Founder
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2025 HB 1311

House Political Subdivisions Committee

Representative Donald Longmuir, Chairman

January 23, 2025

Chairman Longmuir and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee, I am Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 1311. I ask that you give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

There are several hospitals in our state that operate emergency medical services (EMS) operations and many of them rely heavily on volunteers, for example, to staff ambulance services. Our hospital members support the bill because workforce is the number one challenge they face. In rural parts of our state especially, it is increasingly difficult for ambulance services to find enough volunteers. Volunteerism continues to decline and is especially threatened in rural areas, where the population tends to be older. Fewer young people are stepping in to replace the older people who are retiring.

Adding to the decrease in volunteerism, many ambulance services feel the pressure of reimbursement that does not cover the cost of providing the service. Many operate at a loss. So, it is not always financially viable to replace volunteers with paid staff. We must find ways to keep costs low so that ambulances can continue to provide services in rural areas. Volunteers are a critical component. Limited funding, expanding coverage areas, increased educational requirements, and a cultural shift in volunteerism across generations means we need to be creative in finding new recruitment methods that attract more volunteers and keep them as long as possible. We believe that a study to determine barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency responders and to identify strategies to encourage volunteerism would help to stabilize the EMS system in our state.

In summary, we ask that you give HB 1311 a **Do Pass** recommendation.

I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President
North Dakota Hospital Association

2025 SENATE HUMAN SERVICES

HB 1311

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Fort Lincoln Room, State Capitol

HB 1311
3/5/2025
10:45 A.M.

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study regarding volunteer emergency responder recruitment and retention.

10:45 a.m. Chairman Lee opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Lee, Vice-Chairman Weston, Senator Van Oosting, Senator Clemens, Senator Hogan, Senator Roers.

Discussion Topics:

- Impact on Volunteer Types

10:45 a.m. Chairman Lee Recessed the hearing to wait for a testifier.

10:51 a.m. Chairman Lee Reconvened the hearing.

10:51 a.m. Representative Bernie Satrom, District 12, introduced the bill in favor and answered committee questions.

Additional written testimony:

Tim Blasl, President of ND Hospital Association, submitted testimony in favor #38564.

Travis Bateman, Director of Badlands Search & Rescue, submitted testimony in favor #38758.

11:02 a.m. Chairman Lee closed the hearing.

Andrew Ficek, Committee Clerk



2025 HB 1311
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman
March 5, 2025

Madam Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 1311. I ask that you give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

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Adding to the decrease in volunteerism, many ambulance services feel the pressure of reimbursement that does not cover the cost of providing the service. Many operate at a loss. So, it is not always financially viable to replace volunteers with paid staff. We must find ways to keep costs low so that ambulances can continue to provide services in rural areas. Volunteers are a critical component. Limited funding, expanding coverage areas, increased educational requirements, and a cultural shift in volunteerism across generations means we need to be creative in finding new recruitment methods that attract more volunteers and keep them as long as possible. We believe that a study to determine barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency responders and to identify strategies to encourage volunteerism would help to stabilize the EMS system in our state.

In summary, we ask that you give HB 1311 a **Do Pass** recommendation. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President
North Dakota Hospital Association



TO: NORTH DAKOTA LEGISLATURE-69TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

RE: **TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HOUSE BILL 1311**

1/23/2025

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Please recommend a DO PASS for HB 1311.

Thank you and I am available for any questions that you may have.

Respectfully,

Travis F. Bateman

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2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Fort Lincoln Room, State Capitol

HB 1311
3/5/2025
1:23 p.m.

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study regarding volunteer emergency responder recruitment and retention.

1:23 p.m. Chairman Lee opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Lee, Vice-Chairman Weston, Senator Van Oosting, Senator Clemens, Senator Hogan, Senator Roers.

Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

1:24 p.m. Senator Van Oosting moved Do Pass

1:24 p.m. Senator Weston seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Judy Lee	Y
Senator Kent Weston	Y
Senator David A. Clemens	Y
Senator Kathy Hogan	AB
Senator Kristin Roers	Y
Senator Desiree Van Oosting	Y

Motion Passed 5-0-1.

Senator Van Oosting will carry the bill.

1:25 p.m. Chairman Lee closed the hearing.

Andrew Ficek, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1311 ([25.0193.01000](#))

Human Services Committee (Sen. Lee, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (5 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1311 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.