

Modernize Tax Incentives to Recruit and Retain Emergency Responders

PROBLEM

According to the Center for Workforce Development volunteerism in the US has dropped by over 26.8% in the last 10 years. With that and an aging population, the tasks and responsibilities managed by the volunteer workforce continue to suffer. Public service jobs traditionally performed by families for generations including farming, firefighting, and EMS are seeing devastating declines.

The number of volunteers in our state has declined by about 12 % in the past three decades while call volume has nearly tripled. At the same time, the average age of the volunteer EMS responder is increasing. It is critical for the safety of our communities and our nation that we continue to have a strong volunteer EMS service now and in the future.

Recruiting and retaining volunteers are two of the toughest challenges facing the EMS industry. Nearly 70 percent of EMS responders in the U.S. are volunteers, responding to emergencies of all kinds. Over 80 percent of all EMS/Fire emergencies are handled by volunteers in Wisconsin.

The cost to become a volunteer First Responder breaks down like this:

- Wisconsin Technical College training \$1,200
- NREMT Exam \$80
- Est. Continuing Education \$400/annually
- Uniform and Personal Gear \$350

The typical stipend for a volunteer is \$7/hr/call all of this while holding down a fulltime job and raising a family.

A mix of long term stagnant declining reimbursements, other limited financial support and changes to the societal view of volunteerism have negatively impacted EMS throughout our state. The changing dynamics of family units and the economic challenges these families face have also impacted staffing of EMS services. Rising inflation has forced many EMS providers to take on multiple jobs.

Lack of funding to support initial training and continuing education to maintain an EMS provider license also causes many to leave the service, or not to enter it at all.

Emergency responders protect the infrastructure of our community during a fire, storm, hazardous material release and heavy rescue situations.

Legislative action and funding to address this issue.

SOLUTION

Tax Incentives for Retention

We ask for support on the creation of state tax incentives in order to increase recruitment and retain volunteer EMS personnel.

There is a proposed two-part bill that would address tax incentives for First Responders. The first part of this bill creates a nonrefundable tax credit. The credit is equal to \$300 for volunteers who have served for at least five years, but not more than nine years, and \$600 for volunteers who have served for at least ten years. An individual is eligible to claim the credit if the individual is in good standing with the department for which he or she serves and has either completed 360 hours of training and participation or participated in at least 50 percent of the calls or incidents that his or her department has responded to during the taxable year.

The second part of that bill creates a nonrefundable individual income tax credits for volunteer firefighters, emergency medical responders, and emergency medical services practitioners. The credit equals \$20 for each hour for an individual spends volunteering for one of these positions on active duty, in training exercises, or in class completing coursework to improve skills or to obtain or maintain certification. The credits are only available to full-year Wisconsin residents.

We ask that you support this modest incentive to help modernize recruitment and retention of EMS efforts in Wisconsin.