



# MINNESOTA STATE FIRE DEPARTMENT ASSOCIATION

Members of the State of Minnesota Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement,

I am writing on behalf of the fire departments and firefighters in the state of Minnesota regarding concerns with the proposed SF 609/HF 419 bills which aim to redirect firefighter state aid monies.

This legislation, as written, would have an adverse effect on many Minnesota fire departments who are already struggling with budget and recruitment issues. Taking away money to fund firefighter pension increases, without offering hourly compensation or other benefits will be detrimental to an already under resourced and grossly underpaid fire service.

The paid-on-call/volunteer firefighters in Minnesota are already one of the biggest bargains in the state workforce. Most firefighters in Minnesota are volunteer – meaning they take time away from their regular jobs and families to respond to fires, medicals, and other emergencies - for NO PAY. Many of these firefighters are in the fire service for 30 plus years. Departments that rely solely on volunteer or paid-on-call firefighters do not offer any other “benefits”, such as medical or dental insurance, paid time off, etc. This means, not only are firefighters leaving their jobs and families, for no monetary reimbursement or benefits, they are also putting themselves in danger each time the pager goes off.

According to the most recent report from Minnesota Center for Fiscal Excellence the fire service ranks 47th in per capita spending. If this proposed model is adopted, it will take funding away from firefighters’ retirement pensions and the ability for fire relief associations to look at increases. These funds need to be kept within the fire service to support our firefighters. Our firefighters need MORE support, not less. Fire service leaders have been at the capital for years, asking for more.

Imagine for a moment if there were “volunteer” police forces in the state. Public safety should not be “volunteer” and firefighters should be treated the same as law enforcement. I urge you to look at other options than this proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Mark Rosenblum  
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