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Chairwoman Harp, Chairman Geragosian, and Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee, I come before you today in several roles: as District Vice President of the Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association I'm here to advocate on behalf of Connecticut's career fire fighters; as Training Director of the Fairfield Regional Fire School I'm here to speak to the needs of all first responders and public servants from across the state who utilize our regional school; and as Assistant Chief in charge of Training for the Fairfield Fire Department I'm here to protect the needs of the community we serve. Whatever hat I wear, whichever agency I represent, as union officer or training chief, haz-mat responder or training director, my message remains the same: Connecticut's fire service cannot afford any more budget cuts in the current fiscal year.

Career and volunteer departments alike benefit from the state's current partial reimbursement of basic firefighter training costs, yet instead of doubling it as suggested in recent years it's been cut entirely from the proposed budget, leaving local municipalities to pick up the full tab. Whether my department sends a group of newly hired recruits to the Connecticut Fire Academy for basic training or regional departments send their Fire Fighter I and II candidates to the Fairfield Fire School for certification, if you endorse this proposal the entire cost of training must be borne either by local budgets or those individuals who offer their services, resulting in higher property taxes or lower volunteer recruitment throughout Connecticut for both the immediate and foreseeable future.

Regional schools such as ours in Fairfield provide classrooms and practical training facilities to Fire, Police, EMS, Emergency Management & Homeland Security, Public Health, Public Works, Haz-Mat & SWAT Teams, Departments and public servants throughout every part of the state, yet the cuts on the table would put most of us out of business, reducing our operating budgets to between forty-seven and sixty-three percent of those proposed for the current Fiscal Year just eighteen months ago. Our ability to operate on nights and weekends when volunteer department and career firefighters often need our resources most would be virtually eliminated; our available resources to develop training programs in an ever-changing world of hazards would be deeply reduced; our already crumbling facilities awaiting promised bonding and repairs would deteriorate beyond repair in the absence of state funding.

There are several ironies underlying this testimony: the amounts cut, while a tiny fraction of the

deficit Governor Rell seeks to remedy, represent debilitating percentages of funding for the fire service; the very regionalism touted as essential to more responsible fiscal management is represented in the resources being reduced or even closed; and not a month after bonding for our first Regional School restoration in New Haven was finally approved in this building, our very operational viability is being put in jeopardy. Please consider these serious concerns and their potential long-term effects – please listen to the needs of my brother and sister fire fighters, our local fire departments and the communities they serve, and this state’s Regional Fire Schools – and please, please, reject these proposed cuts to the marrow of Connecticut’s fire service.