



## **Pomfret Fire Department**

**67 Hampton Road  
Pomfret Center, CT 06259  
860-974-1508**

February 25, 2015

Appropriations Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Rm 2700  
Hartford, CT 06106

Distinguished Committee Members,

I am writing this letter to express my opposition to the elimination of funding to Connecticut's regional fire schools. Diminished services at the regional fire schools would deliver a damaging blow to many rural departments' ability to recruit, develop, and retain volunteer firefighters.

I currently serve as the chief of the Pomfret Fire Department in Pomfret, CT. We are a small volunteer department covering a 40 square mile rural area of 4,200 residents. Our town is a beautiful place to live, with acres of rolling farm fields, stone wall-lined roads, and green forests. It is a great place to raise a family. However, this same bucolic atmosphere is not in our favor when trying to recruit and retain members in our volunteer fire department. Ours can be correctly called a "bedroom community". We have few storefronts or industries so there are few job opportunities within the town and the majority of our residents commute many towns away for employment. Only 7% of our population is between ages of 18 and 24, leaving us few young people to choose from. Our department, like all in our area, is 100% volunteer, with no local job prospects in the firefighting field that might entice young people to join for the long term.

Our emergency services volunteers are typically ages 30 to 50, with school-age children. Even the most dedicated volunteers are challenged to find those precious hours, balancing work and family, to take the training needed to become qualified and skilled interior firefighters. Giving up those precious family hours is hard enough, to add the burden of travel time and mileage makes attending distant trainings unattainable.

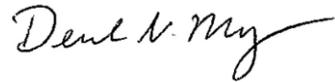
Our closest training school is Eastern CT Fire School in Willimantic. We have sent dozens of our firefighters there for initial and continuing training. It provides a consistent schedule of classes, a safe facility with standardized equipment, and draws on skilled instructors. It is a place where recruits from many local departments can mix and train together. Looking at my own Firefighter I class photo from ECFS in 2000, I see the faces of several who are still serving, now as Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs, leading their departments into the future.

I believe the regional fire schools deliver a more reliable, safe, and effective training environment than is provided by the intermittent classes that pop up locally on no certain schedule, put on by a mixed bag of local instructors. State-centralized training is not a workable

alternative, either. It is unacceptable to ask a 38 year old father of young children to travel two hours back and forth over multiple days for a period of months.

Please renew the commitment and support to the regional fire schools which have been there for us for decades, helping to keep our departments as well-trained, effective, and safe as possible. We need to keep these local schools as reliable and cost-effective avenues for training.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Derek N. May".

Derek N. May  
Pomfret Fire Chief, Pomfret Emergency Management Director  
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