

Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee

My name is Richard Winn, Director of Training for the Burrville Regional Fire School in Litchfield County. I am currently the Assistant Chief of Operations for the West Hartford Fire Department and the President of the Barkhamsted Fire District.

I would like to request your support of House Bill 5518. This bill will provide funding for the operations of the nine (9) regional fire schools in Connecticut. The funding would be through a surcharge on insurance premiums.

I have served as the Director of Training for the Burrville Regional Fire School for nearly thirty years. The regional fire schools provide entry level firefighter training and certification as well as support for annual training required by OSHA and national standards. During that time period the State of Connecticut has always provided assistance in our operating expenses through a grant. In recent years Governor Malloy has not funded these grants in his budget proposals. Thankfully the legislature has seen the need to fund the schools, but at a lower amount. Our only other source of revenue is through registration fees. Due to the cuts in the grant funds we have been forced to raise these fees significantly. Many of the students attending training come from small volunteer fire departments which cannot afford the increase. Some of the students are required to pay the fee themselves. The result is fewer students attending class and therefore fewer trained firefighters in our communities. We have cut our expenses to the bare bones. Most of the cleaning and maintenance is done by our students and instructors. Many of our aging training aids (ladders, hose, self-contained breathing apparatus, ropes...) need replacing. Most of our instructors provide their own personal protective equipment.

It would seem to me that those that get the benefit the most from trained firefighters should be supporting the cost. Residents and visitors to the state certainly receive the benefit and support the training through their tax dollars. Unfortunately those dollars are shrinking. So why turn to insurance. Simply put, a well-trained fire service reduces the cost of insurance. Firefighters routinely use their training in fire prevention programs presented in the schools and the community. Every fire that is prevented is a claim not submitted and paid out. When a fire does occur a well-trained fire department can reduce the damages and therefore reduce the claim. The fire service has and always will do the best they can with what they are provided. It make sense to pay a little upfront to avoid or reduce the cost down the road.

Please support House Bill 5518 so our dedicated firefighters receive the training they need to serve their communities.

Respectfully,

Richard Winn, School Director

Burrville Regional Fire School