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AB419 FIREFIGHTERS MEMORIAL TESTIMONY

Chairman Spiros and committee members thank you for taking the time to hear AB419 today. My testimony will be on the Substitute Amendment.

On April 16, 1996 then Governor Tommy G. Thompson signed into law, legislation designating Wisconsin Rapids as the site of the Wisconsin State Firefighters Memorial. "Wisconsin firefighters put their lives on the line every time they battle a blaze and it is only fitting that we honor those who were lost in the line of duty," Gov. Thompson said. "The State Firefighters Memorial is a tremendous project that will make sure we never forget the courage, bravery and dedication of our firefighters. And Wisconsin Rapids is an ideal location for the memorial because of its central location in the state."

On average the memorial has collected enough funds through the checkoff designation process to cover some of its maintenance costs. The amount collected through tax checkoff donations is around $28,000 per year. The funds are not state dollars but reduce income tax refunds or increase the amount of tax owed by an individual taxpayer. This bill allows that to continue for the next five years at which time we can revisit the issue. The Memorial is also an important piece of the revitalization of the Wisconsin Rapids river front area. The park and walking path draw local interest and increase the awareness of the sacrifice and dedication of our state firefighters, professional and volunteer alike.

The original language of the bill only dealt with half of the problem the Memorial is faced with. The Substitute Amendment makes this bill much easier in regards to annual contributions and the ability to maintain the tax check off status that the Memorial had up until this tax year.

This amended bill allows for the tax checkoff status to remain in effect until 2021 and eliminates the minimum contribution amount that needs to be collected.

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