



January 26, 2016

Testimony on Senate Bill 581
Senator Robert Cowles

Thank you, Chairman LeMahieu and committee members, for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 581.

As most of us are aware, it can be difficult at times to find people to run for local elected office. Those who run for local office are invested in their communities, dedicated to serving their neighborhoods and working to make their local municipality a better and safer place to live.

So too are the responsibilities of our local first responders; our police officers, fire fighters and emergency medical technicians. Senate Bill 581 Raises the limit that a first responder can earn, including fringe benefits, to hold elective office.

Currently, a first responder cannot earn more than \$15,000 annually and hold elective office. This bill moves that limit to \$25,000. This limit has not been increased in nearly 20 years. In many smaller communities across the state, such as some of the rural communities in my district, have found it difficult to find individuals to run for local elected office and enough first responders to fill the needs of the community and keep everyone safe and protected.

This bill would allow a greater number of first responders to run for elected office and be invested in their communities while continuing to serve as a first responder.



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

SB 581: Compatible Offices and Elective Officeholders
Testimony of State Representative Joel Kitchens
Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government
January 26, 2016

Thank you, Chairman LeMahieu, and members of the Committee on Elections and Local Government for holding this Public Hearing.

Currently, a fire fighter, emergency medical technician, or first responder in a city, village, or town cannot hold an elective office in that city, village, or town if they earn more than \$15,000 annually, including fringe benefits. Senate Bill 581 will raise this limit from \$15,000 to \$25,000.

When I was approached by a first responder from my district, I was surprised to learn that the current limits would not allow for him to serve his community in the capacities he wished. Many of our communities are struggling to find people willing to serve as elective officeholders, as well as to supply a sufficient number of emergency responders. In my constituent's case, his desire to serve his community is only restrained by the \$15,000 limit. With a shortage of emergency responders, annual compensation surpasses \$15,000 for the many responders in areas with few emergency personnel.

Originally set in 1955 at \$1,000, the exemption for the annual earnings of first responders has been raised four times. Throughout the first forty years, it was increased about every ten years. It has now been 20 years since it has been increased.

The \$15,000 limit prevents some emergency personnel from serving their community in a local elective office. Dedicated public servants should not be discouraged from choosing to serve their community because of an outdated limit. Senate Bill 581 raises the current limit from \$15,000 to \$25,000 to provide more opportunities for fire fighters, emergency medical technicians, or first responders to serve their communities as an elected official.

Thank you for your time and consideration.