



TO: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions  
FROM: Nicole Hudzinski, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association  
DATE: March 11, 2020  
RE: Assembly Bill 469, tax credit for volunteer fire fighters and emergency responders

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Good morning Chairman Marklein and members of the committee. My name is Nicole Hudzinski and I am the Government Relations Director here in Wisconsin for the American Heart Association. I am here to testify in support of Assembly Bill 469.

I want to start by thanking Representative Pronschinske and Senator Jacque for introducing this bill. I also want to thank this committee for having a public hearing today.

Every day, Americans' lives are touched by heart disease and stroke. Whether it is our own health that is impacted or the lives of family members, friends, or co-workers, there is a lot at stake when it comes to fighting our nation's number 1 and number 5 killers. That's why we advocate for policies that strengthen systems of care— to ensure the world around you is prepared to respond if you or a loved one suffers a cardiac arrest, heart attack or stroke.

Assembly bill 469 creates a small tax credit for volunteer EMS providers and fire fighters having served for 5 years or more. It passed the Joint Finance Committee and full Assembly, both unanimously, last October, and it has no registered opposition.

EMS providers are some of the first providers to care for patients suffering from cardiovascular emergencies. The role of EMS in the system-of-care for these patients is crucial and often sets the course for the patient's outcome. It cannot be underestimated, or underappreciated.

Wisconsin has a large rural area which is mostly covered by volunteer EMS services. Volunteer EMS providers respond whenever the call comes in, whether it be in the middle of the night, right before the son's soccer game is about to start, or the second they sit down for dinner. Those who do this work are committed to helping their friends, neighbors, and community in their time of need.

Assembly Bill 469 creates a \$100 tax credit for volunteer EMS and fire fighters. It is one way for us to say thank you for the commitment they make on behalf of our communities. Please support Assembly Bill 469.



**MANITOWOC  
COUNTY  
FIREFIGHTERS  
ASSOCIATION**  
Established 1948



9<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Senator Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions,

On behalf of the members of the Manitowoc County Firefighters Association, representing the twenty-four career and volunteer fire department agencies with over 400 volunteer firefighter members that protect the residents and business of Manitowoc County, we urge your support of Assembly Bill AB-469.

Volunteer firefighters and first responders serve their communities placing themselves at risk to provide aid to those in need; friends, family, neighbors and complete strangers. Whatever the situation, fire, flood, accident, act of terrorism the list goes on, a 911 caller expects people to respond to their need. Each day in Wisconsin, volunteer firefighters are dispatched leaving their paid jobs, excusing themselves from their daily life obligations and miss-out on family moments and memories for the sake of public safety.

The passage of AB-469 provides the following:

- Recognizes the commitment and the importance the volunteer fire service is to the State of Wisconsin
- Support of volunteers for their time and sacrifices to keeping Wisconsin safe
- A small reward to retain the current volunteers
- An attribute for recruiting new generations of volunteers

The agencies and members of Manitowoc County Firefighters Association whom we represent are asking for your help to bring AB-469 to the full Senate for a vote when you return to the floor on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Gene LeClair  
President  
(920) 920-9132

Christopher Dallas  
Vice President  
(920) 889-5065

Thomas Arndt  
Secretary / Treasurer  
(920) 973-5102



AB-469

## Tax Credit for Volunteer Firefighters

Dear Members of the Wisconsin State Senate:

We the undersigned are asking for your support for Assembly Bill 469 (AB-469) which will provide a \$100 tax credit for volunteer firefighters.

Wisconsin is facing a serious situation as fire departments struggle to fill their ranks. The issue of recruitment and retention is getting worse and your help is needed. Passage of AB-469 would send a meaningful message to the 18,000 plus volunteer firefighters in Wisconsin, and to potential new recruits, that our state government values our service to our communities and the sacrifices we make for our friends and neighbors. Volunteers save the taxpayers over a billion dollars each year, and this modest investment would be greatly appreciated and valued by the volunteers fire service.

As you conclude this legislative session, please give AB-469 your final approval and send it to the Governor's desk.

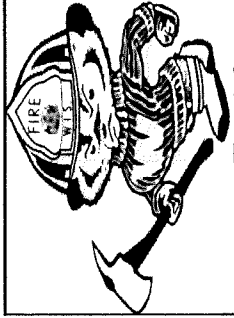
Wisconsin's volunteer fire service is asking for your support.

Please pass AB-469!

Thank you!



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Wisconsin State  
Firefighters Association

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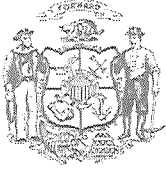
Wisconsin State  
Firefighters Association

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# ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE SENATOR • 1<sup>ST</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

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State Capitol - P.O. Box 7882

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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions  
State Senator André Jacque  
March 11, 2020*

Chairman Marklein and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you as the lead Senate author in support of Assembly Bill 469. AB 469 creates a nonrefundable tax credit of \$100 for volunteer fire fighters, emergency medical responders, and emergency medical service practitioners.

When we call 911 most of us expect that someone will be there in minutes. That is thanks to thousands of dedicated volunteers across Wisconsin who give up time with their families to help ours. But, the sad reality is that the number of volunteer fire fighters in Wisconsin is declining.

AB 469 is one small way to thank those in our community who take the time to train, prepare and respond when someone calls 911, and will help to alleviate some of the financial burden of equipment and training. This credit would be eligible to volunteer fire fighters, emergency medical responders, and emergency medical services practitioners. That individual must be in good standing with the department for which he or she serves and must have served as a responder for at least five years. An individual who has served as a responder in more than one department may combine the time served in those departments when determining whether the five-year time frame has been met.

There are other proposals introduced this session which would offer tax credits to our volunteer first responders, including another by Rep. Pronschinske. I support and have co-sponsored all of them, and I certainly will work toward improving incentives to attract and retain first responders in future sessions. But the simple fact is that this bill before us now is the only viable opportunity yet this session to take a step in the right direction and recognize their vital contribution to our communities in a way that can still become law this session. Inaction is not an option.

This strongly bi-partisan legislation passed the Assembly Ways and Means Committee with an 11-0 vote, the Joint Finance Committee with a 15-0 vote, and the full State Assembly on a 96-0 vote. AB 469 is supported by the Wisconsin State Firefighter's Association, Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association, Wisconsin EMS Association, Professional Ambulance Association of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Fire Journal, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the American Heart Association and the greater volunteer Fire Fighter and EMS Community. Please join us in supporting the creation of this tax credit and recognition of service by Fire & EMS volunteers to our rural Wisconsin communities.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 469.



# Warren Petryk

State Representative • 93rd Assembly District

Date: March 11, 2020

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions

From: Representative Warren Petryk

Re: Testimony regarding Assembly Bill 469

Good morning Chairman Marklein and members of the committee. I appreciate this opportunity to come before you today to speak in favor of Assembly Bill 469.

At some point in our lifetime, we will likely be in a situation where we will need to call 911 for emergency help. When we make this call, we rely on a silent network of skilled and courageous first responders to be available and ready to help us in our time of need who have the training to rescue our loved ones. But over the years, Wisconsin has begun to see a critical shortage in this field, especially for those volunteers who staff our local rural departments.

In Wisconsin, there were 765,170 calls for service in 2017, up from 693,754 in 2016. However, the number of volunteers to help answer these calls has been declining. Also, the average age of a state volunteer firefighter has increased from 50 in 2006 to 60 today. As a State Representative who has a very rural district, we need to continue to pro-actively address this issue and provide a boost to those currently serving.

In previous sessions we helped incentivize students in high school to get a public safety credential to help stem the workforce shortage. Today we have an opportunity to further encourage more people into this profession by providing a state tax incentive for them to want to stay in the profession.

Our emergency responders are dedicated, caring, hard-working professionals who are sometimes unknown to us until we need them the most. That is why we must do all we can to encourage participation in this profession and reward those currently volunteering for the future of our rural communities.

Thank you again Chairman Marklein and fellow committee members for this opportunity to testify.



# TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 469: Tax Credit for Volunteer Emergency Responders

Thank you members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions for allowing me to speak on this important bill today and how it will benefit the citizens of Wisconsin.

I'd like to start by setting a scene for you all. Picture yourself being a volunteer firefighter. It's Christmas Eve. You're sound asleep when suddenly your pager goes off and you are urgently needed. You arrive on scene at 3 am to find a car that has been flipped over. You rush in to help without a second thought towards the accident desperately searching for someone. You find a child who is not breathing. It's a family member of someone you went to school with. But in the heat of the moment you have a job to do.

Scenes like this are not uncommon and accidents don't take holidays. Especially in volunteer departments for both firefighters and EMTs that are often in small and rural communities where people have to leave their full time jobs and often family functions. And it doesn't stop there. These thoughts and images will stay with you for the rest of your life. We have discussed mental health frequently, but our first responders put theirs aside to save lives every day.

Most people expect when they dial 911 someone will be there to help in minutes. But with a dwindling number of volunteers, it could take hours.

I'm here today because I have introduced legislation that would create a nonrefundable tax credit of \$100 annually to any volunteer firefighter or EMT that has five or more years of service in the State of Wisconsin. While I realize this is not a large number to many volunteers, it is the least we can do. Can you imagine if our nurses and doctors were volunteers? Every volunteer I have ever met does not do this job for tax credits. They do it because it is what is right and they have a passion for helping their fellow mankind.

As can be seen from the numerous bills, meetings and discussions held on this issue, we can all agree that there is a coming volunteer emergency responder crisis and it is not just our state but across the nation.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 2015 there were 814,850 volunteer firefighters in the United States. In 2017 there were 682,600. In two years we lost 132,250 volunteers. With volunteer responders having an aging demographic, it is vital to put forth efforts to attract and retain these people. If we do not, the cost to go 100% professional would be astronomical. Especially since more than 90% of Wisconsin's fire departments are staffed





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# TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

mostly or entirely by volunteers according to the U.S. Fire Administration and 53% of EMS agencies are in rural areas.

I am certain that every committee member here today either knows someone, has a family member or has been a volunteer themselves at some point or maybe even has needed emergency services.

With an estimated 23,194 volunteer firefighters and EMT's in Wisconsin, we owe it to these heroes to start finding ways to help them thrive and to help our citizens get the help they need.

It is important to be proactive rather than reactive on this issue.

Again, I appreciate your time and consideration of this important legislation.

Senator Howard L. Marklein Chair  
Senator Jerry Petrowski Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Financial Institutions

Jody Stoker Assistant Chief  
Black River Falls Fire Department  
PO Box 455  
Black River Falls, WI 54615  
715-284-2656 ext. 23

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Support for AB 469 An Act to create 71.07 (8m) and 71.10 (4) (ha) of the statutes; Relating to a nonrefundable volunteer firefighters and emergency responders tax credit. (FE)

Good Morning, thank you for your time and consideration in hearing my testimony today. I am Jody Stoker, Assistant Chief on the Black River Falls Fire Department. The Black River Falls Fire Department is a combination department with one full-time chief and 31 volunteer firefighters. I have 22 years in fire and EMS, with over half of those in the position of assistant chief. I support AB 469 an Act to create 71.07 (8m) and 71.10 (4)(ha) of Wisconsin State Statutes, creating a nonrefundable tax credit of \$100 annually to any volunteer firefighter or EMT that has five or more years of service in the State of Wisconsin.

According to the U.S Fire Administration, more than 90% of the fire departments in Wisconsin are volunteer. This percentage equates to an estimated 23,194 volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians in Wisconsin. They receive little or no compensation for their time. For those few who do receive compensation, it can be as low as \$2.30 per hour, according to the Department of Workforce Development. Over ½ of all EMS agencies in Wisconsin are in rural areas. Losing any volunteers in these rural areas presents a hardship to the area, and also puts additional stress on the neighboring communities as they often get asked to help fill the gaps left by the loss of volunteers. In 2015 the National Fire Protection Agency said there were 814,850 Volunteers in the United States. By 2017 that number had dropped by 132,250, leaving us with only 682,600 volunteers to provide a much-needed service across the United States.

Imagine having a fire in your home. Due to staffing shortages, the first arriving engine from the local volunteer firehouse arrives with three personnel on board. Two firefighters and a driver/operator. The fire has now spread from the appliance to nearby cabinets and furniture. Since the fire can no longer be controlled with an extinguisher, the firefighters need to adhere to the two in two out rule. SPS 330.14(3)(a) Meaning if two firefighters go into the burning building, two must be outside waiting to go in as their back up or rescue team. The mutual aid department from a neighboring community is 15 minutes away. For 15 minutes, all the firefighters can do is put water on the fire from the outside. They are never able to get water to the seat of the fire. Now the small appliance fire has grown and has made its way into the walls.

The fire has also spread to the attic. The second engine arrives from a neighboring department with additional firefighters. (this potentially leaves their area unprotected as they too are a small rural department experiencing staffing shortages) The firefighters can now go into the structure and attack the seat of the fire. They can now put the fire out that they can see. Remember, the fire had gotten into the walls and attic? There is now fire coming out the ends of the roof—the building in modern lightweight truss construction. The trusses have had the flames impinging on them for ten plus minutes. As the crews inside start to pull the ceiling to access the attic, part of the roof collapses. The incident commander pulls all the crews out from inside the building and transitions to a “defensive” attack strategy, not allowing any firefighters to go into the building. With a few holes cut into the outside walls, they can get enough water on the burning attic trusses and put the fire out. Between the 10,000 gallons of water and roof collapse, the home and everything in it is destroyed. If you have the same situation when the first arriving engine is fully staffed has a different outcome. The firefighters can make entry, and the fire is contained to the room of origin. The remainder of the home has minimal smoke damage. This is a scene that could play out in any rural area in Wisconsin. Luckily no one in this situation was injured or killed, but a family lost their home because there were not enough responders to attack the fire safely.

Volunteerism is declining, and those volunteer fire and EMS providers volunteers save municipalities millions in expenses annually. I support AB469 to creating a nonrefundable tax credit of \$100 annually to any volunteer firefighter or EMT that has served more than five years. This credit would be a step in the right direction in helping maintain the declining volunteer force. And may keep some of our struggling rural department answering the call.

Again I would like to thank you for your time today and hope you consider supporting this legislation.

## "A Day In The Life Of"

I have been actively involved in EMS since December 1998 when I passed my EMT Basic. I obtained not only my State of WI EMT Basic license, but also my NREMT Basic license. I have been a very active member of the Mondovi Area Ambulance Service since then. I have spent numerous days, nights, weekends and holidays to be on call for my local ambulance service. At one time, we received under \$2.00 to be on call. I went on the further my education and graduated from CVTC with my Paramedic degree in June of 2000. I worked for 10 years in La Crosse, WI for Tri State Ambulance. I drove over an 1 1/2 hours each way to work 24 hour shifts. I missed out on many family events, holidays, birthdays, etc. I now work as a paramedic in a hospital setting and have been with HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire for almost 10 years.

I very much enjoy taking care of others, but I am feeling the burnout. I not only work 36 hours a week in a paid EMS position - I also volunteer approx 20 hours a week as a EMT for my local service. Our on call pay has now increased, but the burnout is still present. I basically work 3 10-12 hour shifts in the hospital and then take on call time for my local service Sunday - Thursday from 2300 - 0400. I do not always get the best sleep/rest - but I do my best.

My husband and daughter and family are the real hero's - putting up with my crazy EMS schedule - from hearing the dispatch traffic over my pager when I am on call - to be away from home out on a call and responding to calls, etc.

There is a lot of required continuing education that is involved in being a EMT Basic, Intermediate, Paramedic and even as a First Responder.

I am also part of a debriefing team for my region.

I am not ready to give up my valued profession, but I am tired.

Michelle Moats  
State of Wisconsin Paramedic  
NREMT-Paramedic





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# Area volunteer fire department closes its doors

00:00

02:04

February 21, 2020 5:55 pm Amanda Lojewski

NEWS, TOP STORIES, WISCONSIN NEWS

7.8K



HANCOCK, Wis. (WAOW) -- The Hancock Volunteer Fire Department is closed for the time being raising concerns with who to call in the event of an emergency.

We rely on them to be there when we need them the most.

"This isn't a fire-board decision that they wanted to make, this is a state-mandated decision that they had to make," said Erik Johnston, former Assistant Chief for the Hancock Volunteer Fire Department.

But volunteers for the department got a message, telling them the Hancock Fire Dept. is no longer serving the community.

Johnston said, "the state mandates for local fire departments, for volunteer fire departments have increased, it's difficult to keep that training up on a volunteer fire department and that's one of the things we're struggling with here.

Johnston says volunteers haven't been up to speed in terms of training.

"Until we get the training up and up to par where it's legal again they're going to remain closed," said Johnston.

The closing, causing confusion and concern as to what to do and who to call in the event of an emergency. Officials say every resident is still covered.

"Hancock has an ambulance in town as well as first responders from Plainfield, Coloma, Wautoma, or Big Flats," said Johnston.

Since help is coming from different areas, response time might be a little different. But in the meantime, they're asking for your help.

"You know manpower is short nobody wants to volunteer anymore, if you've got spare time join a volunteer fire department um help these guys help your neighboring volunteer fire departments out," said Johnston.

Until they can get back to saving lives the department is trying to stay positive and hopeful that the department will reopen to continue serving the community.



Amanda Lojewski



# A Rural EMS Taskforce

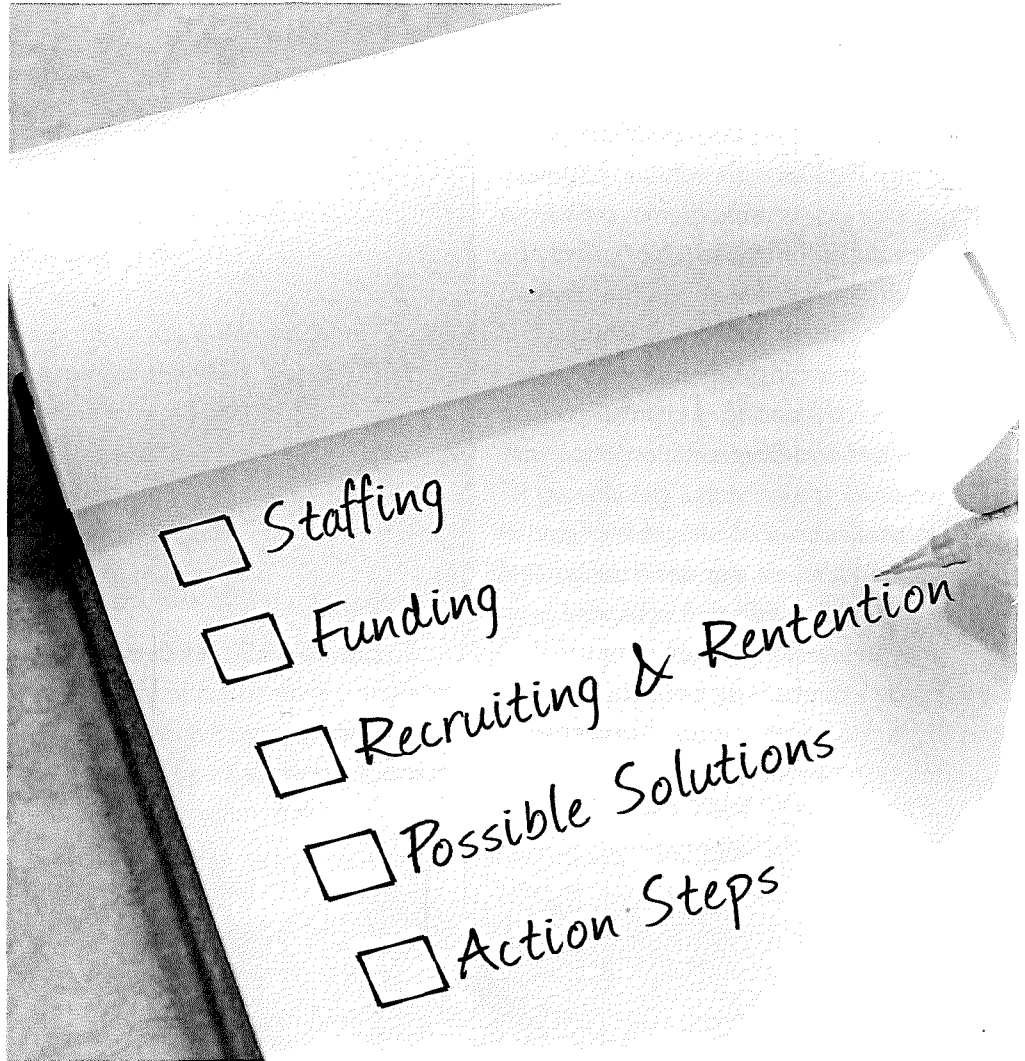
Over the last few months, the Office of Rural Health organized a series of five listening sessions in rural towns around the state: Arcadia, Spooner, Woodruff, Oconto Falls and Boscobel. The purpose was to hear directly from rural services on their challenges, as well as their ideas for solutions. WEMSA, the State Fire Chiefs Association, and DHS sent representatives to almost all of them. Local hospitals hosted the meetings, and services sent their staff and their ideas.

## Staffing

There were common issues in all five sessions. Staffing was the greatest concern, especially among volunteers, but also in paid positions. A variety of reasons were given – dwindling volunteerism, generational differences, and job migration (leaving rural areas for city jobs, or driving to another town for work, which limits shifts one can take back home.) The pay, when an option, also doesn't compare well to other jobs. Many entry-level jobs requiring no education or special training often pay close to (or more than) entry-level EMS jobs.

## Recruiting and retention

Recruiting and retention barriers were also described. The burdens of



initial and continuous refresher trainings on volunteers were cited, along with other "costs to participate." Also noted was the stress of feeling "always on call" in a small service (vs. a shift in which one can leave), and the unexpected challenges of the National Registry test.

Everyone expects the National Registry test to be tough, but the types of questions asked (some were called "trick questions") led many to

feel it did not match the training. This was primarily centered on EMRs. For an entry-level, first responder role, people that passed the training with flying colors felt the test was too great a challenge. This trickled back to the community and kept others from trying.

There are, of course, important reasons for qualifying someone who wants to provide healthcare, and in every conversation the need for

testing was acknowledged. But there was a general sense that the National Registry test needed to be tweaked to bring it in alignment with the training and expectations for the role of an EMR.

### **Funding**

Funding was next on the list of challenges. At the municipal level, city and town managers have to stretch levy-limited dollars from roads and schools to police, fire and EMS. At the reimbursement level, heavier rates of Medicare and Medicaid in rural populations don't adequately cover costs.

There was an overriding sense that the public – from community and state leaders to the average citizen – has no idea what goes into providing Emergency Medical Services. Their expectations for service are wildly disconnected from the resources allocated to it. "Just call 911 and those (paid) paramedics show up to your door for free, because that's where my taxes go."

Comparing the average rates per capita for EMS vs. garbage collection, as Dana Sechler of PAAW likes to state, often creates a look of confusion and disbelief on the faces of those outside EMS.

### **Possible solutions**

There were lengthy discussions on possible solutions at each meeting. On funding needs, removing levy limits on Public Safety was often suggested, so communities could decide for themselves how to balance costs with services that fit their

specific needs. EMS/Fire Districts were proposed, as well as unofficial affiliation and pooling of resources. Also discussed were reviving the "Dollar for Life" initiative, expanding the Funding Assistance Program (FAP) to pay for education and training for all volunteers, as well as tax incentives for volunteering.

On recruiting/retention, adding resources to help students pass the National Registry test was suggested, as well as using the State's position as a customer to pressure the company to remove the "Critical Thinking" questions at the EMR and Basic levels, and otherwise reign in the EMR "trickiness." Creating bridge courses from EMR to Basic, so staff (especially volunteers), don't have to waste hours going back over the sections they've learned (and practiced) already.

It was suggested to create promotional materials, like short videos, social media and brochures, which could be shared with the public, community and state leaders to educate them on the realities of EMS. Also discussed was working with partners to push rural broadband and cell service expansion, because many of our northern counties have large dead zones where an ambulance is unable to communicate for more information or share data on the patient. And finally, it was suggested to add the rural voice to statewide EMS discussions and decisions. There was a general sense that decision making happened in Madison and Milwaukee, primarily assisted by larger, urban services.

### **Action steps**

As a first step, our office will be starting a quarterly conference call with representatives from rural services across the state, and it will be attended by the EMS Section at DHS. WEMSA, PAAW, and the State Fire Chiefs Association (WSFCA) have also offered to listen in, and the EMS Board is considering how this rural group could be added to their work. Our hope is that this continues bringing rural perspectives to EMS decision making, well beyond this listening session tour.

Preliminary meetings with DHS, WEMSA, PAAW and WSFCA have already occurred to share takeaways from the listening sessions, and the reception has been very positive. Our office will be releasing a full report, which will be shared with every state and federal legislator, as well as video highlights from each meeting. Check out <http://worh.org/ems-listening-sessions> for more information as it emerges.

Thank you to all the participants in Arcadia, Spooner, Woodruff, Oconto Falls and Boscobel for taking the time to have these discussions. 🌀

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*John Eich is the executive director for the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health. John can be reached at 608-261-1890. Penny can be reached at 608-261-1887. Both can be reached through the Office of Rural Health website at [www.worh.org](http://www.worh.org).*

## Hetz, Allison

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**From:** Chris Anderson <canderson@264bell.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2020 2:55 PM  
**To:** Hetz, Allison  
**Subject:** Support AB469

TO: State Representative Treig Pronschinske

FROM: Chris Anderson, President  
Professional Ambulance Association of Wisconsin (PAAW)

RE: AB 469

DATE: March 10, 2020

Dear Representative Pronschinske,

As association President, I am contacting you on behalf of the Professional Ambulance Association of Wisconsin (PAAW).

I would like to inform you of our Board of Directors unanimous **support for AB 469**. Additionally, PAAW wishes to offer any assistance in support of this legislation.

Thank you and our very best wishes!

**Chris Anderson, EMT-P** | Director of Operations

Bell Ambulance, Inc. | 549 E Wilson St | Milwaukee, WI 53207

tel [414.486.4044](tel:414.486.4044) | mobile [414.349.3732](tel:414.349.3732) | fax [414.486.6044](tel:414.486.6044) | email [CA@264Bell.com](mailto:CA@264Bell.com)

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