



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN SHORTAGES

Room 412 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI

August 30, 2016
9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the August 30, 2016 meeting of the Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages. The file copy of this summary has appended to it a copy of each document prepared for or submitted to the committee during the meeting. A digital recording of the meeting is available on our Web site at <http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lc>.]

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Nass called the committee to order. The roll was called and a quorum was determined to be present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sen. Steve Nass, Chair; Rep. Jesse Kremer, Vice Chair; Sen. Janet Bewley; and Public Members John Eich, J. Timothy Hillebrand, Gregory Michalek, Jodie Olson, Jeff Rickaby, David Seager, Jr., Dana Sechler, James Small, Jody Stoker, Jay Tousey, and Gene Wright.

COMMITTEE MEMBER EXCUSED: Rep. Debra Kolste.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Margit Kelley, Senior Staff Attorney, and Andrea Brauer, Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Dr. Morna Foy, President, Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS); and Ryan Skabroud, Public Safety Dean, Lakeshore Technical College, WTCS; Edward Conlin, Division Manager, Public Fire Protection Division, National Fire Protection Association; Dan Williams, Director, Door County Emergency Services, former Wisconsin Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Section Chief, former EMS Advisory Board Chair, and former Program Director for University of Wisconsin (UW) Med Flight; and Dr. Marvin Birnbaum, Professor Emeritus of Medicine and Physiology, UW School of Medicine and Physiology, former Vice President of the EMS Advisory Board, former Medical Director for the City of Madison Fire Department and UW Hospital and Clinic EMS Program, and Emeritus Editor-in-Chief, Prehospital and Disaster Medicine; Philip Bochler, Assistant Fire Chief, City of Park Falls Fire

APPEARANCES (CONTINUED):

Department; Ron Hampton, Chief, Village of Cassville Fire Department; Mahlon Mitchell, Lieutenant, City of Madison Fire Department, President, Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin, and President, Madison Fire Fighters Local 311; and Adam Olson, Firefighter-First Responder, Town of Brule Fire Department; Jim Aanstad, Chief, Iola Fire Department and Ambulance Service; Dan Clark, Director, Washburn Area Ambulance Service; Stacy Craig, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)-Basic, Mason Ambulance Service; Allen Kochenderfer, Director, Scenic Valley Ambulance; and Ronald Patten, Fire Chief and EMS Director, Boyd-Edson-Delmar Fire Department.

Approval of the Minutes from the Committee's July 26, 2016 Meeting

The committee unanimously approved the minutes of the committee's July 26, 2016 meeting.

Presentation by Representatives of the Wisconsin Technical College System

Dr. Morna Foy, President; and Ryan Skabroud, Public Safety Dean, Lakeshore Technical College

Dr. Foy and Mr. Skabroud introduced themselves and briefly described the WTCS's role in providing training for firefighters and EMS personnel.

Dr. Foy and Mr. Skabroud first discussed EMS training. Dr. Foy explained that the EMS curriculum is developed by the Department of Health Services (DHS) with the advice of WTCS. She discussed the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians' (NREMT) role in creating and administering its own written exam, which is required in Wisconsin. She also provided a comparison of the national and state exam passage rates. Dr. Foy and Mr. Skabroud described the various places and times at which courses are offered. Lack of broadband access in rural areas was identified as a barrier to online learning. Dr. Foy also discussed a new optional "training pathway," which allows a student to progress from the first responder certificate to the paramedic technician level by using the prior licensure level as part of the qualifications. Dr. Foy also presented data on EMS program enrollment and identified per-credit tuition costs and scholarship availability.

Dr. Foy and Mr. Skabroud then discussed firefighter training, for which most students do not pay tuition. Mr. Skabroud discussed the training standards and how they are developed. He also briefly described the multiple levels of fire certification that exist.

During discussion following the presentation, committee members inquired about the following issues with the NREMT written exam: difficulties taking the test on a computer, concerns with passage rates, and the fact that exam success does not always correlate with competence. Mr. Tousey, Mr. Seager, and others commented that training is often not geographically accessible in rural areas, sometimes courses are cancelled due to low numbers, and rural training needs may be different from urban needs. Mr. Eich inquired whether leadership training is offered and whether hospitals are used as training sites, to which the speakers responded that some schools do offer those options, but it can vary by school and by year. Representative Kremer stated that the greatest challenge is the amount of time to become a volunteer and that he finds the pathway models helpful. Senator Bewley commented on the

consideration of military experience, the difference in cost between firefighter and EMS training, and availability of special needs training in rural areas, such as water rescues. Mr. Seager and Mr. Michalek discussed developing new programs, such as a technical rescue and community paramedicine programs, which Dr. Foy stated could be tested as pilot programs.

Presentation by Edward Conlin, Division Manager, Public Fire Protection Division, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

Mr. Conlin presented on the NFPA training standards for firefighters. He explained that each NFPA standard covers certain fire protection activities and is developed to meet those practice standards. He also described the NFPA's consensus-based standards development process and identified the parties and technical committees who write the standards. He described the standards revision process, which occurs on a five-year cycle. He noted that, as a result of this process, a separate status for driver-operators is recognized in the forthcoming edition of the standards. In addition, he stated that volunteer and career firefighters are trained identically under NFPA standards.

In response to questions following the presentation, Mr. Conlin explained that every state has an agency that certifies to NFPA levels; the organization's meetings move around the country; NFPA's committees are based on issue area and include members who are volunteer, career, rural, and urban; NFPA does not have standards for EMS providers but there is discussion about creating them; there are currently no standards for leadership training but NFPA would respond to requests to create leadership standards; and NFPA is currently undertaking some efforts to consider volunteer shortages through its technical committees.

Presentation by Former EMS Advisory Board Members

Dan Williams, Director, Door County Emergency Services, former Wisconsin EMS Section Chief, former EMS Advisory Board Chair, and former Program Director for UW Med Flight; and Dr. Marvin Birnbaum, Professor Emeritus of Medicine and Physiology, UW School of Medicine and Physiology, former Vice President of the EMS Advisory Board, former Medical Director for the City of Madison Fire Department and UW Hospital and Clinic EMS Program, and Emeritus Editor-in-Chief, Prehospital and Disaster Medicine

Mr. Williams and Dr. Birnbaum presented on the background of EMS training requirements in Wisconsin and nationally. Dr. Birnbaum stated that EMS began in Wisconsin in 1966, with licensure beginning in 1973. He discussed prior efforts to improve EMS training, and summarized the results of prior reports and recommendations to the Legislature. These included prior study committee recommendations; reports from the EMS Board; evaluations of Wisconsin's EMS system by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Technical Assistance Team; and a national report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Dr. Birnbaum stated that there is no data to give feedback to EMS providers on outcomes after patients arrive at the hospital.

Mr. Williams stated that EMS training has been a recurring issue with a piecemeal approach. He discussed the increase in training hours and commented on the lack of data to show how this increase has affected outcomes. He discussed the need for improved medical director training and increased medical director involvement with their EMS services. He also

discussed funding issues, including lack of grant availability, lack of federal funding, and the potential that Medicare and Medicaid may adopt a pay-for-performance model at the EMS level. He also stated that volunteer ranks are declining for various reasons, and that the main motivation to volunteer is likely linked to community pride. In addition, he discussed EMS regionalization models using his experience as Door County's EMS Director as an example.

Following the presentation, committee members engaged in a discussion with Mr. Williams about how regionalization models could work and about involvement of dispatch centers in those models. Mr. Tousey commented that regionalization may not have the same effect rurally, where the coverage areas are already large, while Mr. Williams and Dr. Birnbaum commented that if an area had a planned system with trained dispatch, strategic placement of ambulances, and strong reliance on first responders, a wide area could be served. Dr. Birnbaum also suggested considering volunteer recognition and leadership training. Mr. Rickaby, Mr. Sechler, and Mr. Williams discussed billing practices and commented that Wisconsin EMS providers are often not paid for the full amount that is billed, for various reasons.

Presentation by Wisconsin Firefighters

Philip Bochler, Assistant Fire Chief, City of Park Falls Fire Department; Ron Hampton, Chief, Village of Cassville Fire Department; Mahlon Mitchell, Lieutenant, City of Madison Fire Department, President, Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin, and President, Madison Fire Fighters Local 311; and Adam Olson, Firefighter-First Responder, Town of Brule Fire Department

The committee heard a presentation by a panel of Wisconsin firefighters, who each spoke separately about their backgrounds, observations of volunteer shortages, and experiences with firefighter training. Each of the speakers commented on the large time commitment that training requires. The panel discussion also addressed geographic accessibility of training and the national standards and testing component. Panel members also shared recommendations, including allowing differences in training content based on local needs, offering length of service awards, reaching out to the community about the importance of volunteering, promoting regionalization, modifying levy limits, and providing more hands-on training.

Committee members asked the panel about the following topics: regionalization and consolidation options, the time commitment and expense of training, the availability of online training, the extent of staff shortages, the use of local groups to assist in alleviating the shortages (e.g., local public works departments providing ambulance drivers), and the provision of equipment and other funding issues. In response to questions, one panelist commented that he does not advocate for less training but recommends streamlining the process and recognizing that volunteers are not paid for that time commitment.

Presentation by Wisconsin Emergency Medical Service Personnel

Jim Aanstad, Chief, Iola Fire Department and Ambulance Service; Dan Clark, Director, Washburn Area Ambulance Service; Stacy Craig, EMT-Basic, Mason Ambulance Service; Allen Kochenderfer, Director, Scenic Valley Ambulance; and Ronald Patten, Fire Chief and EMS Director, Boyd Edson-Delmar Fire Department

The committee heard a presentation by a panel of Wisconsin EMS personnel, who each spoke separately about their experiences with EMS training and staff shortages. Topics raised by panel members included the time commitment required and geographic distance to training, among other issues. The panel also discussed the quality of the training and NREMT exam passage rates. Mr. Kochenderfer stated that his department obtains training through private companies rather than WTCS. Multiple speakers described the extent to which they are experiencing staff shortages, particularly with the younger generation. They also expressed some difficulty finding medical directors. The panel also raised the following additional issues: that the credentialing requirement can prohibit inter-department cooperation that some employers do not allow employees to leave work to respond to an emergency, the daily fluctuations in volunteer availability, the amount of time needed for data reporting, and the decline in volunteerism in society generally.

Discussion of Committee Assignment

Chair Nass asked committee members to identify recommendations to address issues raised regarding firefighter and EMS training requirements, and other issues, for further discussion at the next committee meeting. The following recommendations were identified:

- Create a tax incentive for volunteer firefighters and EMTs for equipment purchase and for training time, including travel time.
- Create a tax incentive for employers who allow their employees to leave work to respond to an emergency.
- Extend the EMS licensure renewal deadlines to require the EMS refresher courses every three or four years rather than every two years.
- Submit to NFPA recommended changes to firefighter training standards.
- Submit to NREMT recommended changes to the written exam.
- Prohibit technical college courses from including more hours than are required for licensure.
- Offer the NREMT written exam on paper rather than on the computer.
- Make volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel eligible for participation in the Wisconsin Retirement System.
- Offer college loan forgiveness for students who volunteer for rural fire or EMS departments.
- Consider the liability of firefighters, EMS providers, and medical directors.
- Alter or eliminate the requirement that EMS personnel be credentialed with the EMS service provider.
- Reinstate the IV Tech program.

- Create a state fire marshal position.
- Create a community paramedicine program.
- Provide additional funding for EMS training.

Chair Nass asked members to submit any additional ideas on training to Legislative Council staff.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Plans for Future Meetings

Chair Nass has scheduled the next meeting of the Study Committee for Tuesday, September 20, 2016.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

AB:jal