

**Wisconsin Legislative Council**  
**Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages**

Testimony by:  
Nathaniel J. Melby  
Fire Chief, Town of Campbell Fire Department

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Honorable committee members, before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank you all for allowing me to speak with you today. I'm very grateful for this opportunity, and I feel a significant responsibility in representing my community, my department, and the volunteers in our great state's fire and EMS service. The volunteers of the State of Wisconsin stand ready, at this very moment, to respond to all-hazards emergencies in their response areas. Each organization has unique characteristics, just like the unique communities that they serve. The roots of our American volunteer fire service reach back to our founding fathers, when Benjamin Franklin started the first volunteer fire department, Philadelphia's Union Fire Company, in 1736. The common thread that ties all of these people together is their unwavering dedication to protection, and willingness to step forward to help others in their time of need.

I began my fire service career almost 20 years ago when the father of one of my friends, who was also our local Fire Chief, encouraged me to join the fire department. I enrolled in entry level firefighter training at Western Technical College, while at the same time pursuing a bachelor's degree at UW-La Crosse, and working nearly full-time between multiple jobs. Over time, I continued to earn certifications as a firefighter, and became the Assistant Chief responsible for Training and Safety in my department. In parallel, I joined the Town of Campbell First Responders, a separate EMS organization providing first responder care to my community, and earned certification as an Emergency Medical Responder. As the years passed, my passion for serving my community only increased, and I continued seeking advanced training. I became Fire Chief in 2009. Today, I am certified as a Fire Officer II, and Emergency Services Instructor III, which is the highest level of fire service certification that Wisconsin provides. In 2011, I received the Chief Fire Officer Designation from the Center for Public Safety Excellence. From 1997 to 2015, I worked full-time and was a full-time student in addition to pursuing fire and EMS training. In 2015, I completed my doctoral dissertation, and finished my Ph.D.

I am currently the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association (WSFCA), and was recently elected to this position after serving two years as a Trustee. I am the chair of the Safety Section for WSFCA, and have led the establishment of a Volunteer and Combination Officer Section (VCOS) within that organization to increase the voice of volunteers. I am also the President of the La Crosse County Fire Officers Association, and Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Division 134. I am a strong advocate for volunteers in emergency services, and firmly believe that trained personnel are safe personnel.

## Development of Fire/EMS System

The Town of Campbell was originally created in 1851, and was officially named after Erasmus D. Campbell, a former Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin. As the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska incorporated and grew over time, Campbell's borders changed through a series of annexations and divisions. Today, the Town of Campbell is confined to part of a large island bordered by the Mississippi and Black rivers and Lake Onalaska. This island has been traditionally known as "French Island", and sits on the Wisconsin/Minnesota border, directly on Interstate 90. Today, Campbell has 4,410 people, 1,754 households, and 1,266 families residing in the town. We are a densely populated suburban community.



In April of 1946, the Campbell Fire Department was formed by a group of citizens that wanted to provide better fire protection to the community. The first fire truck was a 1946 Chevrolet, with a 500 gallon per minute pump, and a six-cylinder engine. CFD's second truck was a 1958 International, both colored red.

Today, the CFD is a modern fire department, providing all-hazards response to the Town of Campbell. CFD responded to 338 calls in 2015, a combination of fire, medical, and special responses. Of these calls, 243 were EMS related. CFD firefighters carry certification as firefighters, fire instructors, driver/operators, inspectors, fire officers, emergency medical responders and technicians, and ice and water rescue technicians, along with training and certifications in hazardous materials and technical rescue. CFD's honor statement is "Ne Relinquas"- a proud Latin statement which means that we never quit, never abandon, and never leave anyone behind. CFD was recently reclassified by the Insurance Services Organization (ISO), an independent insurance industry organization that rates fire departments, as a Class 3 fire department, which is a reflection of the dedication of CFD's volunteers in providing quality services to our community.



## Structure of Fire/EMS Delivery

The leadership of the Town of Campbell consists of a five-member Town Board, with a full-time Clerk/Treasurer and two part-time office staff. The Fire Chief is appointed by the Town Board following election from the Fire Department body of membership, per the department bylaws.

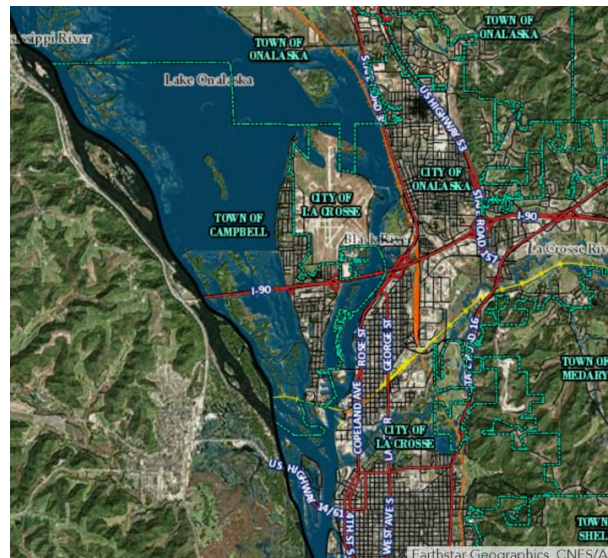
The Fire Chief appoints a Deputy Chief, Asst. Deputy Chief, 4 Captains, 1 Lieutenant, and an EMS Captain.

Across the nation the number of volunteer firefighters continues to decline. The Campbell Fire Department has been fortunate to be operating in the reverse of this trend, noting an increase in firefighters over the last 10 years. The department has increased from 16 personnel in 2009 to 43 personnel in 2016. However, the recruitment and retention of quality staff is a continual process. Firefighters receive pay per call in the form of a stipend intended to defray the costs of damaged clothing, fuel, or other inconveniences from their response. A length of service award program is in place to recognize the service of personnel.

CFD has a service area of 12.6 square miles, including approximately 8 sq. mi. of water in the rivers and lake, and approximately 4 sq. mi. of populated area on French Island. Firefighters and apparatus are quartered at the Campbell Fire Station, and responses are directed by a predetermined response matrix. All personnel carry radio pagers, and respond to the station when tones are activated by the La Crosse County Dispatch Center. In 2012, the Campbell First Responders, a separate group providing EMS to the Town of Campbell, merged into CFD. At that time, the president of the First Responders had retired, and I was the Vice President. I became both the President of the First Responders and the Fire Chief. Both organizations joined together to provide more tightly integrated operations. EMS personnel operate under an Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) license, and have training levels from EMR to EMT-Paramedic. Tri-State Ambulance provides Paramedic Ambulance transport services throughout the region, and local fire and EMS organizations do not transport patients. Our average response time in 2015 was 5.79 minutes.



*Town of Campbell, Wisconsin*



*Campbell Municipal/Fire District Boundaries*

CFD's fire protection services are augmented by the La Crosse County Mutual Aid Agreement, which establishes a mechanism to receive emergency response from all La Crosse County Fire Departments. Additionally, CFD has a long-standing mutual aid partnership with the City of La Crescent, MN, the neighboring community directly to the West across the WI/MN border. CFD is also a member of Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Division 134, which provides a

statewide mutual aid system to the State of Wisconsin. CFD provides reciprocal mutual aid services to all of the aforementioned fire departments through these mutual aid relationships.

### **Benefits or Drawbacks to the System**

A challenge of the volunteer model is the ability to meet on-scene operations, critical tasking, and effective response force standards consistently across all hours of the day. CFD's capability to meet these standards can vary during certain times. During the daytime hours, a greater number of volunteers are at work and rely upon employer support to respond. Weekends and evenings can generally have additional responding personnel due to traditional non-working hours. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1720 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments, requires a department like CFD to assemble 6 staff for an attack in 14 minutes, 80% of the time- a requirement significantly exceeded by our current performance.

As an entirely volunteer-based model, CFD relies upon the availability and commitment of our volunteers for our success. The recruitment and retention challenges faced by our fire service are a national problem, but the solution to these challenges is mainly local. While we recognize that we have been fortunate in our ability to build our ranks in the recent years, we can see our existing personnel struggling to balance family commitments, work commitments, and life events. As we continue to require a greater time commitment for training, it becomes more difficult for them to continue to find that balance. We are fortunate to be geographically concentrated, and this helps our system to stay manageable for our staffing model.

### **Looking Forward**

In Wisconsin, we rely upon volunteer-based services for the majority of our Fire and EMS services. The recruitment and retention problem is a nationwide, multivariate, problem, and the solutions are largely local, multivariate, solutions.

In order for these models to remain viable, I would like to recommend that the committee consider the following:

1. Property or income tax incentives for volunteer Fire and EMS personnel.
2. Legislative changes to exclude Fire and EMS from levy limits and allow districts for funding.
3. Do not reduce training requirements, but consider assisting training by:
  - a. Legally protecting training time for volunteers in a manner similar to national guard or reserve training.

- b. Supporting the Wisconsin Technical College System in efforts to extend and virtualize training to make it more available to candidates.
  - c. Training has a statistically proven correlation to increased safety.
- 4. Create a funding mechanism for EMS training (counterpart to 2% fire dues program) to raise EMS training levels across the state.
- 5. Support committee efforts to improve firefighter training and safety (SPS 330). This administrative code was recently reviewed and updated by committee but has not moved forward.
- 6. WSFCA has applied for a near \$1 million grant with FEMA SAFER to aid the Wisconsin fire service in recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters, and we could use your support for our application.

Thank you for your time, attention, and your commitment to helping our volunteers provide protection to our communities now and into the future. I would be glad to answer any questions.

## Appendix A: CFD Call Statistics 2015

**Total 2015 Calls for Service: 338**

### Fire Calls

CFD responded to a total of 95 fire calls during 2015.



<i>Type</i>	<i>Count</i>
Water	7
Structure	8
Vehicle/Extrication	14
Grass	2
False Alarm	15
Carbon Monoxide	8
Miscellaneous	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>

### Emergency Medical Services Calls

CFD responded to a total of 243 EMS calls during 2015.

**Total EMS Calls 243**



Respiratory	14
Medical Alerts	10
Cardiac Related	15
Vehicle Accident w/Injury	11
Stroke Related	6
Lift assistance/injuries	37
Trauma	20
Code (Pulseless/Non-breathing)	11
Overdoses	12
EMS Assist	4
Diabetic Related	5
General illness/injury	77
Assist P.D.	2
Allergic Reaction	1

**Average Response Time: 5.79 minutes**

## Appendix B: CFD Call Distributions 2015

<b>Fire (95 Calls)</b>		
Time		Number
0000		0
0100		5
0200		3
0300		1
0400		2
0500		4
0600		3
0700		5
0800		2
0900		2
1000		8
1100		8
1200		5
1300		5
1400		4
1500		6
1600		5
1700		7
1800		3
1900		4
2000		4
2100		5
2200		2
2300		2

### Fire Calls by Weekday - 2015

Day		Number
Sunday		10
Monday		14
Tuesday		19
Wednesday		10
Thursday		14
Friday		11
Saturday		17