



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN SHORTAGES

Room 411 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI

November 15, 2016
9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the November 15, 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; Rep. Debra Kolste; 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.

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

APPEARANCES: Kevin Bierce, Fire Chief, Pewaukee Fire Department.

<p>ATTENTION: This was the final meeting of the Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages. Committee members are requested to send any corrections regarding these Minutes to the Legislative Council staff. After the incorporation of any corrections, these Minutes will be considered approved by the committee.</p>

Approval of the Minutes from the Committee's October 18, 2016 Meeting

The committee unanimously approved the minutes of the committee's October 18, 2016 meeting.

Presentation by Legislative Council Committee Staff Regarding LRB-0567/P1, Relating to Authorizing the Creation of a Fire Service District, Authorizing a Fire Service District to Levy a Property Tax, and Authorizing a Fire Service District to Impose Special Charges and Issue Debt

Ms. Kelley briefly described LRB-0567/P1, a bill draft that authorizes the creation of fire protection or emergency medical service (EMS) districts as political subdivisions of the state. Ms. Kelley stated that the language in the draft had been submitted to Chair Nass and the committee by other parties and, because it had authorized only combined fire and EMS districts, it had been revised for the committee's purposes to authorize creation of districts that may provide fire protection, EMS, or both. She noted that some other aspects of the draft could be reviewed or revised. Chair Nass noted that any particular aspects could be amended during the legislative session, if the bill is introduced, and asked members to consider the concept presented in the bill draft.

Presentation by Kevin Bierce, Fire Chief, Pewaukee Fire Department

Chief Bierce introduced himself and offered some general comments on the fire and EMS district bill draft. He noted that volunteerism is declining, but that volunteers would be needed and utilized for the foreseeable future. He commented that if communities chose to enter into a district as authorized under the bill draft, the district could share the assets, spread the costs, and share the administrative work of providing fire protection and EMS in an independent jurisdiction of its own. In addition, he commented that residents would have a voice in district operations through the elected commissioners. Chief Bierce stated that the bill draft would be beneficial for the communities that join a district, but suggested that the draft could use some revisions, such as providing a monetary incentive to join, ensuring that districts maintain eligibility for the 2% fire dues program, and other aspects. He recommended obtaining more input from communities and fire and EMS chiefs.

In response to questions, Chief Bierce commented that paying for staffing would continue to be the largest expense for a district, including the stipends for volunteers, and that recruiting volunteers would continue to be a challenge. He suggested that an incentive could be provided for a pilot program, for perhaps one district in an urban area and one in a rural area, to see what works best for each. In response to further questions, Chief Bierce noted that districts might work better for some communities than others, and that the bill draft would give the communities the opportunity to make that determination.

Discussion of Bill Drafts and Letter Drafts

- LRB-0246/P1, relating to intravenous (IV) technician endorsement for emergency medical technicians.

Ms. Brauer briefly described the bill draft and noted that under the draft the scope of practice for an IV technician would be determined by the Department of Health Services (DHS) and its EMS Board. Mr. Hillebrand commented that the bill draft would allow a lower level emergency medical technician (EMT) to administer glucose or saline by IV or intraosseous infusion with fewer training hours needed than the training to become an advanced EMT. He stated that making it more attainable would be an advantage in recruiting volunteers.

- LRB-0247/P1, relating to licensure or certificate renewal for certain emergency medical services personnel.

Ms. Kelley briefly described the bill draft and noted that under the draft the continuing education requirements and the details for the delineation and administration of the four-year renewal period would be determined by DHS and its EMS Board. Chief Wright noted that a four-year renewal cycle works well in Illinois, with the continuing education requirement raised to capture the longer period. He stated that a longer period would help alleviate some of the renewal pressure, which causes some volunteers to leave. Committee members discussed whether to recommend that the current continuing education hours be stretched out over the four-year period or whether a minimum number of training hours should be completed annually. Based on comments about the need to review patient safety protocols, Chair Nass directed that the draft maintain that DHS and its EMS Board determine the continuing education requirements.

- LRB-0567/P1, relating to authorizing the creation of a fire service district, authorizing a fire service district to levy a property tax, and authorizing a fire service district to impose special charges and issue debt.

Chair Nass noted that one point of the committee's charge is to consider whether organizations could help address the shortage of volunteers, and that the bill draft could offer another option to communities in addressing all of their local needs. Representative Kremer commented that it can be difficult for providers to give up their identity, but that the identities can be maintained while strategically providing services in a shared district. A number of members commented that districts could be effective in many areas of the state to eliminate the duplication of equipment, but others noted that if there are not enough volunteers or if populated areas are too distant, then staffing would continue to be a challenge. Mr. Seager noted that the draft allows a district to fund itself through fees rather than a property tax levy, and could therefore be more equitable to property owners in a district.

- LRB-0589/P1, relating to funding for first responder training and certification and making an appropriation.

Ms. Brauer briefly described the bill draft and noted that it expanded the permitted use of the training portion of the funding assistance program to include first responder training. Mr. Sechler suggested that providers would be better able to retain all staff if the training portion of the funding assistance program could be used for all levels of training. A compromise was suggested and generally agreed upon to maintain the bill draft's permitted use of the funding for first responder training, in order to assist in recruitment efforts, and to revise the draft to permit funding that is unused and escrowed in the year it is distributed to be used in subsequent years for all levels of training, in order to assist in retention efforts.

- LRB-0590/P1, relating to reinstatement of a lapsed emergency medical technician license or first responder certification.

Ms. Kelley briefly described the bill draft, and, in response to a question from Representative Kolste, noted that if both this bill draft and draft LRB-0247/P1 were to be enacted, an individual would have a four-year renewal cycle and an additional four years to reinstate a lapsed license if not renewed at the end of the four-year cycle. Some committee members commented that it would be preferable to have a longer renewal cycle while a person is more likely to receive some continuing education than a longer reinstatement period during which the person is neither practicing nor receiving training. Based on the committee's discussion, Chair Nass suggested that this draft not be moved forward for a final vote.

- LRB-0595/P1, relating to revising the length-of-service awards program in the Department of Administration for volunteer emergency response personnel.

Ms. Brauer briefly described the bill draft. Committee members generally approved the bill draft and did not suggest any changes.

- LRB-0596/P1, relating to prohibiting local units of government from prohibiting their employees who are emergency responders from volunteering to serve in that same capacity in a different jurisdiction.

Ms. Kelley briefly described the bill draft. Representative Kremer and some others noted that they had heard interest on this concept from providers, because it could allow individuals who are already trained to volunteer in their local communities. Other members expressed concern that a career firefighter or EMT could become injured while volunteering and then would be unable to respond to calls with the employer. Mr. Seager also noted that there could be difficulty in determining which provider would be responsible if an individual contracts a disease that has a statutory presumption of being employment-connected. A few members commented that they see the benefits in their communities when a person who works as a firefighter or EMT in a neighboring community also volunteers their time with them.

- LRB-0683/P1, relating to creating a refundable individual income tax credit for emergency responders.

Ms. Brauer briefly described the bill draft. A number of members expressed their support for both this bill draft and LRB-0685/P1. Representative Kolste noted that this bill draft might be preferable because it offers a better benefit for the volunteer, and could be easier to claim than the other credit, which would require the volunteer to keep track of mileage and individual expenses. Mr. Eich commented that some volunteers might prefer the more immediate benefit of an annual income tax credit than a later tax-deferred benefit from the length-of-service award program.

- LRB-0685/P1, relating to creating an individual income tax credit for certain expenses incurred by an emergency responder.

Ms. Brauer briefly described the bill draft. Committee members generally approved the bill draft and did not suggest any changes.

- Draft/1, letter to the Wisconsin Technical College System and Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association.

Ms. Brauer briefly described the letter draft. Committee members generally approved the letter draft; however, Mr. Hillebrand noted that the committee had not addressed the difficulty many people have in passing the certification exam from the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT). Committee members acknowledged that the exam can be perceived as a burden by potential volunteers, but some members stated that the national certification is important in testing, and recognizing, the professionalism of EMS personnel in the medical field. The members unanimously recommended that the technical colleges review their course curriculums to ensure that they are teaching to the NREMT standards and that the colleges address any disparities between students' passing rates for their courses and the passing rates for the first attempt on the NREMT exam.

- Draft/1, letter to DHS.

Ms. Kelley briefly described the letter draft. After a discussion on whether it would be preferable to recommend that a service be allowed to provide a higher or lower level of service than its licensed call response level, Chair Nass directed that the letter be revised to recommend that DHS allow a service flexibility in providing both a higher or lower level of call response than the service's license level if that flexibility is approved in its operational plan.

Mr. Eich moved, seconded by Mr. Seager, that the following bill drafts and letter drafts be moved forward for final consideration by the committee: bill drafts LRB-0246/P1; LRB-0247/P1; LRB-0567/P1; LRB-0589/P1 as modified in the comments above; LRB-0595/P1; LRB-0683/P1; and LRB-0685/P1; letter Draft/1 to the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association as modified in the comments above; and letter Draft/1 to DHS as modified by the comments above. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Rickaby moved, seconded by Mr. Seager, that bill draft LRB-0596/P1 be moved forward for final consideration by the committee. The motion carried by a vote of Ayes, 12 (Sens. Nass and Bewley; Reps. Kremer and Kolste; and Public Members Eich, Hillebrand, Olson, Rickaby, Sechler, Small, Stoker, and Tousey); Noes, 3 (Public Members Michalek, Seager, and Wright).

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

MSK:jal:ksm