

**Statement for the
House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee**

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OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER

Edward A. Mann, State Fire Commissioner

Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato and members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak at this hearing today on House Bill 2427. I am State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the Pennsylvania fire service, I first want to thank you for your continued leadership on and attention to matters that affect them. Sometimes we all tend to forget the important things that we've done. So, before I discuss my thoughts on HB 2427, I want to briefly review the new and very significant things that Governor Corbett and the General Assembly have accomplished over the past four years to help the fire service.

In 2011, Representative Farry introduced HB 797 to provide a legal presumption to make it more balanced for firefighters to pursue workers' compensation for certain types of cancer. Governor Corbett signed that bill into law as Act 46 of 2011.

I also want to express my appreciation to the General Assembly for supporting Act 13 of 2012, the Marcellus Shale law. This legislation is providing \$750,000 annually to the Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC), and an additional \$750,000 to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, out of the impact fee to help our first responders prepare, train and respond to issues that may arise related to natural gas development. Additionally, counties have tens of millions of dollars in new revenue that comes directly to them which can be allocated to fire and emergency response efforts. Act 9 of 2012 also requires the gas company operators to: provide 911 GPS addressing for well sites, post signs with information to assist first responders in responding to any emergency event, and prepare emergency response plans for well sites. These are very important public safety measures that other natural gas producing states have not taken.

Another important initiative is Act 78 of 2012 which affected the Fire Company-Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program. Act 78 increased the grant from \$25 million to \$30 million and, for the first time ever, the grant now includes our career fire departments. Act 78 also restored \$500,000 in critical funding to OSFC's budget which had been cut prior to 2011. These funds have been used to directly support the fire service through: the restarting of our popular Academy on the Road Program, returning to a full complement of Resident Training Programs, restoring Instructor Workshops; the ability to offer Professional Development Workshops; enabling the State Fire Academy to upgrade curriculum used in the Local Level Training System, and updating and adding hands-on instructional tools at the State Fire Academy. Given the tough budgetary constraints of the past four years, Act 78 was a major accomplishment on

behalf of the fire service. Yet another important step to help our volunteer fire companies is Act 129 of 2013 which amended the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program (VLAP). This legislation doubled the current loan amounts offered through the VLAP and marked the first major changes to the program since 1984.

With regards to HB 2427, we all know that funding is a major issue for many fire departments. That's why Act 78 of 2012 and Act 129 of 2013 were so very important. Municipal budgets have continued to shrink which unfortunately means there are fewer resources available at the local level for public safety matters.

HB 2427 would allow volunteer fire companies to bill a person for reasonable and necessary expenses for an emergency response from a fire company. The person would not have to pay if:

- (1) The person paid a tax which funds at least part of the fire company's services to the municipality in which the fire company is located, or
- (2) The person has made a monetary contribution to an annual fund drive of the fire company recognized by the host municipality within 12 months preceding the date of the emergency response.

So if a person pays a local fire tax (as my municipality requires) or the person made a contribution to an annual fund drive, he or she would not need to pay for an emergency response. You should know that some fire departments are already billing for expenses similar

to the requirements in HB 2427. From my discussions with fire chiefs, some fire companies have success in collecting the fee. Unfortunately, many others do not collect much at all.

As you may be aware, there was a situation several years ago when a person in the Radnor area was involved in an accident and was then billed for police service for the emergency response to the incident. That billing initiated the move to get emergency response fees for police service banned in Pennsylvania. I just wanted to bring that to your attention as you move forward with HB 2427.

In closing, I want to stress something that I believe is of utmost importance in trying to address the challenges facing Pennsylvania's fire services -- there must be a true partnership between state and local governments and the fire service in order to develop a comprehensive "tool-box" of solutions to the issues facing the Pennsylvania fire service today and in the future. HB 2427 is another possible tool to help address the financial issues that our volunteer fire companies are facing today.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.