

Good Morning, first of all I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Dan Shacreaw, I am 30 years old and I am currently the 2nd Assistant Chief at the Black Lick Volunteer Fire Company where I've been a member for 14 years. I would like to thank State Representatives Struzzi and Sainato for addressing the concerns of the Volunteer Firefighter Crisis and also the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

We are here today to discuss Legislation being introduced and the SR 6 Report. The Volunteer Firefighter Crisis isn't just a Pennsylvania issue, it's a national issue, potentially a boarder line emergency if you ask me. How do we begin to solve these issues or problems, well we have a good start in recognizing that we have a problem. I as many don't have answers but I do have suggestions to try to combat these issues.

In 2015, when I was working for PennDOT I was selected to become an OI (Operator Instructor). During my time learning, we performed an exercise called critical thinking. Let's take my chart as an example.

In the center of my chart is of course the main topic of the Firefighter Epidemic. Branching off into my four main concerns areas. Volunteers, Training, Funding, and Time. Most of these go hand in hand and can be tied together. Now these are my 4 main concerns, but if you would pass a blank document around the room, everyone's chart would be different. So lets talk about something I have listed and how they are of a concern in the SR 6 Report and to the very issues we are facing.

First let's talk about Volunteers and Jr Firefighters. Jr Firefighters are few and far between. With the average age of the Volunteer Firefighters nationwide being 40 years old and over, we must ask ourselves why? Changes in training, time, fundraising? I believe one possible way to address the lack of Jr Firefighters would be that of introducing a program at the High School Level.

Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center is a prime example and has a program that could become an example state wide. CWCTC offers a program called Protective Services, which according to fire chiefs that I have talked to, has a waiting list for students to get into. This program offers multiple fire and emergency service classes that students can attend while in high school.

Zach Saflin a firefighter with Crabtree, is a prime example of how these programs offer benefits to these Jr Firefighters.

During his time at CWCTC, Zach completed 240 hours of certified training out of the potential 484 hours offered. These certifications include both Fire and Rescue Certifications. Now let's talk time, 484 hours transitions to sixty and a half days of 8 hours training days. Most teenagers won't take out the trash let alone take 484 hours of training outside of a school day. In speaking with Fire Chief Bill Watkins of the Crabtree Volunteer Fire Company, Bill explained to me that CWCTC currently has a waiting list for students to enter their Protective Services Program and that they are working on expanding the program throughout Westmoreland County. So, the program must be working if they have a waiting list. But how can this turn into a benefit?

Well now as we certify Jr Firefighters, they can transition into Sr Firefighters filling many vacancies. If a student chooses to continue their education at a college or technical school, they potentially have the chance at becoming a Live-In Firefighter. Live in programs are offered throughout the nation including the building we all are currently sitting in. By a student becoming a Live In they now have the potential to save anywhere from \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year on room and board.

Now let's talk Logistics into getting a Program up and running. Location, Time, and Funding. Most school districts are pressed for room and funding. One solution could potentially be looking into the FEMA Safer Grant to help provide costs associated with these classes. There could also be ways to consider using the County Fire Academy's to host these classes, bringing in revenue for the fire academy's that would be a benefit to all firefighters.

There is no doubt that this would take a lot of work and effort to get up and running, but the building block to the foundation has been laid at CWCTC.

Now back to my chart and switching gears lets talk about Training and Certifications. In my 14 years with the Black Lick Volunteer Fire Company and 8 years in the PA Army National Guard's CERF (CBRN Enhanced Response Force) now HRF (Homeland Response Force), I have obtained a folder about an inch thick with Certifications. My question is what is the benefit to me having these courses?

I have Thousands of hours of Training and Certification's but to what benefit? If only there were some way of getting a college or university to recognize these certifications, some not all, maybe the Pro Board or Nationally Recognized Certifications to transfer them over into College Credits. How would this be a benefit?

Well if something like this were to happen, we now open many avenues for citizens to better their selves. I do not have a college education but if some of these certifications were recognized, maybe it would give me a push to pursue a degree. If a citizen has some college credits but doesn't have the time to go back to college maybe they can now join their local volunteer fire company to obtain some of these certifications to complete their degree. This would now be a benefit to not only those who have been in the fire service for years but also a new way of recruiting volunteers into the fire service.

By having a program designed to recognize these certifications as college credits, it may give a new opportunity to a family or individual to better their career and help their community at the same time.

In my final moments I would like to revert back to my chart that I had provided to show that there are many more issues to address in the Volunteer Fire Service. Funding, Time, Duplication of Equipment, Executive business, the list goes on and on. The ideas and thoughts of each individual are different but we must start somewhere! This chart can be used as a building block of ideas and thoughts throughout the state to combat the volunteer firefighter crisis.

Today is a step in the right direction for tomorrow. The only ones that can solve these problems are those that are in the spotlight. I pray that the day never comes when someone dials 911 and no one is there to answer the call. Combating these issues now and in the future is a huge step in the right direction in moving forward. I am only one person and can only speak for a volunteer fire company that consists of 25 members and runs approximately 200 calls a year. But we seem to be facing the same challenges as the larger and smaller Volunteer Fire Companies Nationwide. I would like to thank you for your time and for your consideration for having me present some ideas to combat the Volunteer Firefighter Epidemic.

