



MONROEVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY 4

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House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee

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Testimony from Jason Yarosik FF/Medic Monroeville Volunteer Fire Co. #4

Good Morning, my name is Jason Yarosik and I am a firefighter and paramedic with the Monroeville Volunteer Fire Co. #4. Before I expound on my departments operations and why I think a tuition reimbursement program is important, I would like to thank the Indiana Fire Association for hosting all of us today. I attended IUP from 1997-2001 graduating with a BSN in nursing. I obtained my EMT training right on campus at Keith Hall in 2000 at the encouragement of a fellow nursing classmate, who left the City of Pittsburgh EMS to attend the same nursing program. He recognized my passion and interest and I thank him for that. That Tuesday/Thursday EMT class was the start of a very rewarding career in healthcare coupled with even more rewarding experiences that I've obtained in the volunteer fire and EMS service. I used to go for evening runs through Indiana passing the old fire station. In those days I don't believe IUP students could be members. Since then it appears that IUP and the IFA have a great marriage, two state of the art facilities and a live-in program that benefits both parties.

I've been a firefighter/medic in Monroeville for the last 15 years. I also have served as the treasurer for the last 8 years overseeing a 3-million-dollar renovation project, multiple vehicle purchases, EMS billing operations and I am very in tune with the financial struggles that fire and EMS agencies across the commonwealth have experienced. If any of you have glanced at the 2018 SR6 report, you are aware of these struggles. The 2004 report was very similar, and I don't believe many changes were enacted. Let's hope others aren't here in the future speaking about the lack of changes that occurred from the most current SR6 report.

After graduation I relocated to North Carolina at the University of North Carolina Hospitals at Chapel Hill where I worked as an ICU nurse. I relocated back to Pittsburgh after 3 years having obtained a flight nurse job with Stat Medevac and became involved with the Monroeville Fire Department #4. I flew for 8 years for Stat as a flight nurse on the weekends, volunteered at the firehouse any chance I had and went to nurse anesthetist school full time. I have been a nurse anesthetist for 14 years, having worked at the VA Hospital in Pittsburgh for the last four years.

I was much more fortunate than many students in that I graduated from IUP with 30,000 in student loan debt. My parents worked extremely hard to pay off the other half.

I finished CRNA school with 100,000 in student loan debt. Once again, I am fortunate in that I have a job that allows me to pay on that.

It's no secret that students today are saddled with student loan debt that forces them to work several jobs, leaving little to no time to volunteer anywhere much less obtain the countless hours of

firefighter and EMS training that is required. The SR6 report cites many additional reasons for the lack of volunteering and I am more than happy to interject on any of those reasons.

Now that you have seen what type of background I come from I think it's very important to stress that I am one of 60 members of the Monroeville Volunteer Fire Co. #4. Our department is one of five fire companies in the Municipality of Monroeville which is located 12 miles east of the City of Pittsburgh.

We are unique in that we provide fire, rescue and EMS and virtually all our members are firefighters trained along with being EMT's and or Paramedics. I can't speak for the eastern side of the state, but this is unique to Western Pennsylvania. Our yearly call volume is 5,500 with 4,500 of those being EMS runs and 1,000 being fire responses. We cover 19.5 square miles and protect a daylight population of 70,000 with a nighttime population of 33,000. We are responsible for fire, rescue and EMS along the Pennsylvania Turnpike as well as the parkway. An additional side note is we have 7 long-term care facilities in our first due which provides approximately 50 cardiac arrest calls per year.

You may remember the SR6 report quoted that there were 1,645 EMS agencies in 2013 and that number dropped to 1,278 in 2017. Our department can attest that our call volume increased in that we took over EMS for the town of Pitcairn which borders us. Several other EMS agencies in our immediate vicinity went out of business as well during this time.

Our 60 members come from many different occupations and backgrounds and range in age from 16-72 years old. Some of our occupations include pipeline workers, dentist, Lifeflight nurses, dispatchers, engineers, police officers, perfusionist, nurse anesthetist, medical student, as well as several

career paramedics and EMTs that also volunteer in that role with us. Last year alone we logged 2,159 fire incident hours, 542 detail hours and 2,230 training hours. That equates to 4,932 hours of volunteering or 123 weeks.

Our funding stream is dominated by EMS income making up 85% of our income. As you know we are tied to government reimbursements and we are at the mercy of insurance companies on this. As a side note and to stress the government's lack of action in both Fire and EMS particularly here it is well known that several of our frequent flyers call for an ambulance, we transport them and send them a standard bill and the insurance companies still mail the checks to the patient. They cash them and keep the money and the EMS agency doesn't see a dime. Why is this still allowed to be a standard practice?

10% of our income comes from social hall/bingo and wedding operations. We pay people to manage and work this as we cannot ask volunteers to give up anymore of their precious time to man these events. The final 5% comes in the form of a bi-annual fund drive that has been generating the same amount of money for the last 30 plus years.

We currently operate 3 ALS ambulances, one heavy rescue truck, one ladder truck and two pumpers. We have 7 full-time employees who receive a salary and benefits as well as many of our members work part-time EMS shifts to cover our schedule. Typically, one ambulance is staffed by a volunteer crew during the day and two are staffed by volunteers at night. Our EMS staff will staff the fire trucks as well when a volunteer crew isn't readily present.

As for the reason we are here the tuition reimbursement incentive program, I feel very strongly about this piece of legislation. My department has operated a live-in program for over 35 years and it serves as the backbone of our institution. Each year we attract 6-8 students who come live in our fire station dormitories, obtain training and voluntarily answer a large volume of calls. We pay for all the training. The stipulations to live in the firehouse are that you must either be obtaining a higher level of

education be it a trade, college, EMT, paramedic class or you must be employed full time. Many of our students obtain paramedic training and a degree at the University of Pittsburgh. Current tuition for this program exceeds 6,000 dollars.

As of last year, I along with the executive board started a tuition reimbursement program in house that offers similar incentives to the proposed legislation. This was done out of necessity to our EMS operations. Once again, I reference the SR6 report where the total EMS provider number decreased from 30,000 to 17,000. We in Monroeville have certainly felt this as well.

In 2018 we reimbursed our members 20,000 dollars for paramedic, EMT, and Advanced EMT training. That money comes directly from our EMS revenue and could be used for many other pieces of equipment that we are in dire need of however without a state level of reimbursement we are doing all we can to obtain and retain members. We cannot continue to offer this program indefinitely.

Many of our members whom were students have attended or are attending institutes of higher learning in the Pennsylvania system. We currently have active members who are attending Penn State for medicine, Pitt for Emergency Medicine and several other various degrees. By offering a tuition forgiveness program to these men and women it provides a small token of appreciation with the hopes that they stay involved in their fire and EMS companies after graduation.

This is a different generation of volunteers then say 30 years ago as was well documented in the SR6 report and it's time that Pennsylvania follows the lead of other states in adopting meaningful legislation that hopefully helps to stem the defection of volunteers in every community across the state.

Thank you for this opportunity and I would be happy to entertain any questions.