



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Testimony for Public Hearing

House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee

Dylan Ferguson,

Director

Bureau of Emergency Medical Services

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Good Morning, Chairman Farry, Chairman Sainato, and members of the committee. I am Dylan Ferguson, director of the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services within the Pennsylvania Department of Health. I have been involved in EMS for the last 15 years, and I have had the honor of serving as Pennsylvania's state EMS director for the last two years. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on House Bill 1819, which would create the Pennsylvania State Fire Commission under the leadership of the proposed position of state fire chief.

The Department of Health, specifically through the Bureau of EMS, has enjoyed a very collaborative working relationship with the Office of the State Fire Commissioner for many years. Our respective offices, while having at times very different roles, functions, and responsibilities, have a great respect for one another.

It is this respect and collaboration that has led to such successful programs as the Joint Pennsylvania Rescue program known as the Voluntary Rescue Services Recognition program or VRSR for short. This program was last articulated in a memorandum of understanding between our respective offices in 2011.

House Bill 1819 is a byproduct of the work done on the Senate Resolution 6 commission. The Department of Health has been and will continue to be very supportive of the various legislation that have been introduced as a result of SR 6 and will continue to work to support the mission of propelling emergency services forward throughout the commonwealth and in ensuring a sustainable future.

As it relates to House Bill 1819 specifically and the general concept of the formation of a fire commission for the purposes of providing oversight and coordination of fire related activities; the Department of Health defers the task of providing specific commentary on that topic to the Office of the State Fire Commissioner and the fire departments across Pennsylvania. Allowing the State Fire Commissioner and fire departments to provide input will mirror the process that EMS agencies and organizations took to construct their structure in 1985, and again in 2009 with the passage of Act 37.

The Department appreciates that the proposed legislation provides for EMS representation on the commission with the appointment of both the EMS Bureau Director and representation of both a volunteer and career ambulance or rescue organization. Particularly, because as proposed the commission would be responsible for administration of both the Volunteer Fire and EMS grant program, and the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program (VLAP).

These are both programs that financially impact Emergency Medical Services Agencies throughout our commonwealth and are areas that the Department currently provides information and consultation to the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, including representation on the current vehicle funding review committee for the VLAP program.

As the state's lead EMS agency, we stand at the ready to provide whatever assistance, support, and information that we can to assist the general assembly and this committee in ensuring the continued provision of high-quality emergency services throughout our state.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.