

HJR 743 (2007)

Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters and Rescue Squad Members

1. WHY ARE WE HERE TODAY?

Resolution --

HJR 743, in a nutshell, calls for a study of incentives for fire and rescue squad volunteers in an effort to recruit and retain qualified individuals.

Eight of you have been appointed to this study; you are allotted three more meetings in which to complete your work; your work must be completed no later than November 30, 2007; and a summary of your findings and recommendations are due no later than January 9, 2008, the first day of the 2008 General Assembly Session.

History of Volunteer Firefighting Companies and Volunteer Rescue Squads --

Volunteer Firefighting Companies -

Rome and France --

Then in Rome the first fire brigade consisted of a group of slaves hired by Marcus Egnatius Rufus. In AD 6, Augustus took the idea and formed the Vigiles who fought fires with pumps and bucket brigades, as well as poles and hooks and ballistae to tear down buildings in advance of flames (Thought that "hook" in "hook and ladder" comes from this). In France, in 1254, the residents of Paris were allowed to create their own night watches, separate from the king's, to prevent crimes and fight fires. They were disbanded in the 16th century by King Charles IX, leaving the king's night watches responsible for preventing crimes and fighting fires.

United States --

Benjamin Franklin created the first volunteer fire company, the Union Fire Company, in 1736 in Philadelphia.

George Washington was a volunteer firefighter in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1774, but it was not until 1853 that the United States had professional firefighters in government-run fire departments (Cincinnati, Ohio -- also the first to use steam fire engines).

Volunteer Rescue Squads -

First independent volunteer rescue squad was the Roanoke Livesaving and First Aid Crew, established in **1928**.

In **1968**, state involvement began with the Virginia Ambulance Law calling for development and enforcement of standards for all ambulance services (municipal, commercial, volunteer). The Bureau of EMS was created in the Dept. of Health.

1970's:

- The first advanced life support personnel graduated in VA Beach
- More comprehensive EMS legislation by General Assembly
- First EMT-Paramedics were certified
- EMT Instructor Trainer Program initiated
- VA Rescue Squad Assistance Fund created by legislation and grants were awarded

1980's:

- Regional EMS Councils designated by the State Bd. of Health
- First air medical evacuation service dedicated in Salem, VA
- First Responder Program initiated
- "One For Life" legislation passed, adding \$1 on motor vehicle registration fee to support EMS (later increased to \$2 and now is \$4)
- Major efforts to address recruitment/retention problems

1990's:

First and only state sponsored satellite EMS training program
initiated by EMS and broadcast monthly
VA one of first states to adopt new National Standard EMT-Basic
Curriculum
Recertification requirements for all certification levels updated

2000's:

Official definition of an ambulance was passed by GA
Extensive review initiated of EMS Rules and Regulations

Types of Departments in VA --

There are three types of fire and rescue squad departments --
(i) career/professional or paid
(ii) volunteer
(iii) combination (career and volunteer)

The career/professional type is generally located in larger urban areas
(City of Richmond).

The volunteer type is generally in the more rural areas (Lunenburg
County).

The combination is generally in the smaller urban areas (Hanover County)

Then there are the fire departments that include emergency medical services but
these are mostly professional.

2. WHAT'S BEEN DONE THUS FAR?

Studies --

There have been four studies since 1990, all of which examine issues concerning volunteer fire departments, volunteer rescue squads (emergency medical services) or both. They are:

a. *Emergency Medical Services Personnel Training and Certification and Recruitment and Retention* (1990) - Report of a Joint Subcommittee;

b. *Insurance Coverage for Volunteer Firefighters and Rescue Squad Members* (2001) - Report of the State Corporation Commission;

c. *The Feasibility and Appropriateness of Streamlining the Various Regulations Governing Volunteer Fire Departments and EMS Services* (2002) - Report of a Joint Subcommittee; and

d. *Review of Emergency Medical Services in Virginia* (2004) - Report of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission.

While the **1990 EMS study** report (a. above) contains a list of overall social and economic changes that put pressure on volunteer fire and rescue departments (i.e. aging population, increase in single parent families, change in motivation and social attitudes, etc.), the joint subcommittee did not come up with recommendations because the people involved (volunteers, paid personnel, medical advisors and Dept. of Health officials) could not reach a consensus on the most appropriate method for addressing the situation.

The **2001 SCC study** report (b. above) found that the majority of VFDs and VRSs in Virginia were providing some insurance protection for the volunteers; the level of participation in VFDs and VRSs did not vary much whether or not workers' comp insurance was available; and Virginia's wage replacement benefits for volunteers fell below what other states provided at the time.

The **2002 Streamlining Regulations** study (c. above) found a need for continued emphasis on recruitment and retention for VFDs and VRSs, recognizing the need to strengthen the partnership between localities and the legislature in developing strategies to address these issues and looking to VML and VACO to offer their ideas on the issue.

Finally, the **2004 JLARC study** (d. above) determined that EMS agencies throughout the Commonwealth believed that recruitment and retention of EMS providers was a major problem at that time. Such agencies reported losing large numbers of such providers in 2003, mostly due to personal reasons and not having the time to give to the work. Poor leadership and lack of management training were cited in surveys as affecting volunteer retention. Time and again those responding pointed out the lack of qualifications that those in leadership positions had. The study also talks about the different incentives currently in place including the Volunteer Firefighters' and Rescue Squad Workers' Service Award Fund. JLARC recommended that the Office of Emergency Medical Services should develop and distribute to EMS providers descriptive information about the Fund.

Statutes --

There are currently a number of statutes in the Code of Virginia that provide incentives to volunteer firefighters and rescue squad members. These incentives range from paid leave for state employees to local option group health insurance to a tangible personal property tax break to a retirement pay plan covered by the Volunteer Firefighters' and Rescue Squad Members' Service Award Fund.

3. WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Other states laws --

Staff is currently in the process of collecting information concerning the types of incentives that the other 49 states offer their volunteer firefighters and rescue squad members. That information will be made available to you for consideration during a future meeting.

List of new incentives --

From all of the information that you will receive today and in the remaining meetings, you will be able to develop a list of new incentives that could be the subject of legislation in 2008 and thereafter. You also may decide to amend some of those that are currently in the Code.

Work Plan/Schedule --

Today, it would be helpful to develop a schedule for the remaining meetings of this joint subcommittee and to provide staff with any additional requests for information with regard to this study. Also, if there are groups or individuals you want to hear from, please let us know.