

## **HJR 743 - Joint Subcommittee studying Incentives for Fire and Rescue Squad Volunteers**

*(<http://dls.state.va.us/volunteers.htm>)*

November 27, 2007

### **Fourth Meeting**

The fourth and final meeting of the joint subcommittee studying incentives for fire and emergency medical services volunteers was called to order by Chairman Rust. The joint subcommittee members then proceeded to discuss the legislation that they had proposed during their third meeting in order to decide which, if any, they want to recommend for introduction during the 2008 General Assembly Session.

Drafts of the proposals had been sent in the mail to the members of the joint subcommittee prior to the meeting in order for them to prepare for this discussion. Drafts were also available to all interested parties during the meeting.

### **Subcommittee Discussion Regarding Legislation**

The chairman began by reviewing the following four proposals made during the September meeting:

1. An income tax credit ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 for volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services personnel in good standing based on a sliding scale related to length of service and the completion of training requirements;
2. Financial assistance for EMS training through the Office of Emergency Medical Assistance Services (OEMS) accredited programs around the Commonwealth;
3. A budget appropriation in the amount of \$250,000 for the biennium for the Commonwealth's share of the VOLSAP Fund; and
4. A \$2 increase in the \$4-for-Life fee to \$6-for-Life with the money raised applied to cover some of the costs resulting from the proposals in this package.

The joint subcommittee was reminded that the upcoming session is going to be a challenging one with regard to the budget due to the estimated \$641 million revenue shortfall that is currently being projected. Therefore, it is expected that any of the proposals that would create further revenue losses would most likely have difficulty gaining the support needed for passage.

With that in mind, and following a presentation made by a representative from the Department of Taxation regarding the fiscal impact of the tax credit legislation (an estimated minimum loss of between \$12 million and \$22 million annually for the Commonwealth), it was the consensus of the subcommittee not to go forward with the proposal as one of its recommendations.

Next, the subcommittee determined after much discussion that the second proposal that provided for reimbursement of training funds by OEMS was unnecessary because OEMS already has the ability to do that through the Virginia Rescue Squads Assistance Fund. Because it was not needed, that proposal was not recommended.

The joint subcommittee did agree to support the third proposal to seek an amendment to the budget to provide for a \$250,000 contribution for the biennium (\$125,000 annually) to the VOLSAP fund, the retirement fund for volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services personnel. The chairman indicated he would pursue the amendment with the Appropriations Committee staff and would welcome other legislators' support in that effort.

Finally, the subcommittee turned to the fourth proposal to increase the \$4-for-Life automobile registration fee to \$6-for-Life. Some of the legislators expressed concern about how that fee has grown from the original \$1-for-Life amount. Therefore, \$2 increase did not find the support if needed. However, the two citizen members expressed concern about doing more than just seeking the \$250,000 VOLSAP contribution budget amendment which led to the approval of legislation to increase the fee by \$0.25 to \$4.25. Chairman Rust and Delegate Wright will co-patron the necessary legislation for that recommendation.

## **Final Recommendations**

At the end of the meeting, a majority of the joint subcommittee had agreed to support two of the four initial proposals. The recommendations are:

1. An amendment to the budget in the amount of \$250,000 for the biennium for the Commonwealth's share of the VOLSAP Fund; and
2. An increase in the \$4-for-Life fee to \$4.25-for-Life with the money raised going into the Virginia Rescue Squads Assistance Fund to defray some of the costs associated with the certification and recertification training of emergency medical services personnel.

Prior to adjourning the meeting, the chairman thanked the members of the subcommittee, the staff, and the public who had participated for all of their support and efforts during the past several months in trying to develop incentives for volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services personnel.