

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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## Task Force Will Examine Recruitment and Retention

**F**irefighter recruitment and retention is the topic on the mind of everyone in the fire service. And as with any issue of this magnitude, there are no easy or straightforward solutions. Senate Joint Resolution 7 represents one legislative response to the very real problem that fire departments are facing regarding hiring.

Sponsored by Senator Patrick Joyce (D-Kankakee) and Representative Michael J. Kelly (D-Chicago), SJR 7 creates the Recruiting and Retaining Public Employee Firefighters and Paramedics Task Force to identify solutions to the shortage of eligible applicants for firefighter and paramedic positions.

The Task Force is made up of the following nineteen appointees:

- Four members of the General Assembly;
- Three members representing the Associated Firefighters of Illinois (AFFI);
- Three members of the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association;
- Three members representing the Illinois Municipal League;
- One member representing the Northern Illinois Alliance of Fire Protection Districts;
- One member representing Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts;
- One member representing the Illinois Fire Service Institute;
- One member representing the Illinois Community College Systems;
- One member of the Office of the State Fire Marshal;
- One member representing the Illinois Department of Public Health

The Office of the State Fire Marshal will provide administrative support to the Task Force. Under the provisions of SJR 7, the task force is required to hold five meetings and submit its final report to the General Assembly and Governor by January 1, 2024.

The Task Force was created to provide a forum to bring fire service stakeholders together to devise solutions. The resolution grew out of discussions between the AFFI and the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association and is intended to address the shortage of career firefighters, thus the inclusion of “public employee” in the Task Force name. While the emphasis is on career employees, the fire chiefs hope that any recommendations coming out of the task force will also be applicable to part-time and volunteer firefighter recruitment.

Recruitment and retention concerns are not unique to the state of Illinois. It is a nationwide problem, and according to the AFFI, Illinois is the first state to organize a task force to look at the issue. SJR 7 asks task force members to examine barriers to recruitment and retention; the role of community colleges, IFSI, IDPH and OSFM in assisting local governments with recruiting; paramedic licensure and testing requirements; current statutory hiring requirements and policies; and fire department sponsorship requirements to receive training. The Task Force can go beyond the areas outlined in the resolution and look at any factors pertaining to firefighter hiring.

In speaking with stakeholders, recruitment of paramedics is a pressure point for fire departments. By including

the Illinois Department of Public Health in the task force, the hope is that there will be a definitive conversation regarding how current state training, testing and certification of paramedics is impacting their employment.

Private and rural emergency medical service providers are also asking the legislature to address EMT and paramedic shortages. Senate Bill 761, sponsored by Senator Kimberly Lightford (D-Hillside) and Representative Lakesia Collins (D-Chicago) creates the EMT Training, Recruitment, and Retention Task Force. The task force created by SB 761 will look at some of the same issues as the Firefighter Task Force under SJR 7, but with a focus on ground ambulance service. Those issues include barriers to training, testing and recruitment, but will also look at the impact of EMT and paramedic shortages on the state’s EMS and healthcare systems.

One factor that may impact the work of the Firefighters and Paramedics Task Force is the ambitious timeline. While SJR 7 was adopted by the General Assembly in May, appointments were still being finalized in October with the task force’s first meeting scheduled for later that month. Proponents initially hoped to have recommendations for legislative action during the spring 2024 session, but with a reporting deadline of January 1, 2024, the task force will need to complete their work in just two months to meet that goal. According to the OSFM, meetings and deadlines will be discussed by the Task Force during their first meeting. ■



## FALL 2023 IAFPD LEGISLATIVE REPORT

### **Public Act 103-0009 (SB1963)** **VOLUNTEER TAX CREDIT**

This bill creates the Volunteer Emergency Workers Tax Credit which will be in effect for a five year period beginning January 1, 2023 and will provide a tax credit to a volunteer emergency worker who serves for at least 9 months during the year and does not received compensation as a volunteer emergency worker in excess of \$5,000.00. A credit of up to \$500.00 per year can be claimed on the emergency worker's annual Illinois (not federal) income tax return. The credit is applied against the worker's total Illinois income tax liability. It is not a refundable credit and will only cover the worker's actual Illinois income tax liability. Each year, the maximum aggregate amount which will be granted under this law will be limited to \$5 million. Credits are awarded on a first come first served basis. Requires that local fire chiefs report names of qualifying individuals from their department to the Office of the State Fire Marshal each year. (Effective Date: 6/7/2023)

### **Public Act 103-0052 (HB3769)** **FIREFIGHTER INSURANCE CONTINUANCE**

This makes changes in the Illinois Insurance Code to change the terms "Fireman" and "Firemen" to use the term "Firefighter." The term firefighter is as defined in the Illinois Pension Code for purposes of the firefighter's continuation privilege which allows a firefighter to elect to continue group health insurance coverage during retirement or disability. (Effective Date: 1/1/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0131 (HB1625)** **SALE OF DISTRICT REAL ESTATE**

This bill amends Section 10a of the Fire Protection District Act (70 ILCS 705/10a) to allow for an appraisal to be made by a non-MAI state certified or licensed real estate appraiser. This changes the prior requirement which was that the appraisal be made by an MAI appraiser. (Effective Date: 1/1/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0134 (HB1740)** **EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT**

This bill amends the Rescue Squad Districts Act to rename the law as the "Emergency Services Districts Act." The purpose of this amendment is to allow for the creation of a separate unit of local government for the purpose of providing rescue and/or ambulance service (but not fire service). A referendum is required to create an emergency services district. As currently written, an emergency service district has a property tax rate limit of .20%. By a separate referendum, a tax for ambulance service at a rate of .40% can be levied in addition to the base tax. The Act provides that an emergency services district may not be located in a fire protection district that provides rescue services unless the emergency services district is formed only to provide ambulance service. (Effective Date: 1/1/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0151 (HB2258)** **FURNITURE FIRE SAFETY**

This bill amends the Furniture Fire Safety Act to require that the Office of the State Fire Marshal adhere to federal regulations regarding flammability of upholstered furniture and it repeals other sections of the Act. (Effective Date: 6/30/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0174 (HB2972)** **RESCUE SQUAD FEES**

This bill amends the Rescue Squad Districts Act to authorize rescue squads to charge and collect fees for rescue squad services and ambulance services which do not exceed the reasonable cost of the service. (Effective Date: 6/30/2023)

### **Public Act 103-0190 (HB3406)** **AUTHORIZED EMERGENCY VEHICLE**

This bill amends the Illinois Vehicle Code to add state and county governments to the authority for designating and authorized emergency vehicle. (Effective Date: 1/1/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0220 (SB1611)** **FIREFIGHTER TRAINING LEAVE**

This bill establishes the Firefighter Training Leave of Absence Act which requires that state employees be granted leave from their state employment for firefighter training. During the leave of absence for training, the state employee continues to receive regular compensation from his or her regular state position unless the employee receives separate compensation for the fire service training in which case the state compensation is reduced by that amount. Note: This law does not apply to firefighters who are not state employees. (Effective date: 1/1/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0226 (SB1750)** **EMT TRAINING**

This Act provides that a fire protection district must reimburse mandatory training expenses of district EMS personnel, but only if the general assembly appropriates funds for the reimbursement by the district of mandatory training expenses. (Effective date: 1/1/2024)

### **Public Act 103-0307 (HB2372)** **YOUTH INTERVENTIONISTS**

This bill amends the Fire Investigation Act to add a new section to create the position of Youth Firesetter Interventionist Coordinator within the Office of the State Fire Marshal. (Effective date: 7/28/2023)

### **Public Act 103-0366 (HB3940)** **EMERGENCY TELEPHONE SYSTEM**

This bill makes revisions to the Emergency Telephone System Act including adding definitions of "EMS personnel" and "first responder;" adding language regarding text messages to 9-1-1 systems; renewing various sections of the Emergency Telephone System Act scheduled for repeal on December 31, 2023; and making other changes. (Effective dates: 7/28/2023 and 1/1/2024)

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## Fall Legislative Report

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### Public Act 103-0351 (HB3508)

#### PFAS REDUCTION-FOREVER PATHWAY

This bill provides that the Illinois EPA will establish a take back program for fire department for foam containing PFAS. The program has a term of five years or until the Office of the State Fire Marshal determines that there is no PFAS containing firefighting foam reported in a survey of fire departments. The program is to provide funding for proper disposal or destruction; however, it is subject to funds for the program being appropriated by the General Assembly. (Effective date: 7/28/2023)

### Public Act 103-0377 (SB1250)

#### FIRE RESISTANT MATERIAL

Adds the Spray Fire-Resistant Material Applicator Act which will require registration with the State Fire Marshal's Office by persons engaged in the business of spray fire-resistant material. (Effective date: 7/28/2023)

### Public Act 103-0484 (SB1251)

#### AMBULANCE/RESCUE VEHICLE OPERATOR TRAINING

This Act requires that an operator of an ambulance or rescue vehicle have documented training in the operation of the vehicle which includes the proper use of warning lights and sirens and requiring that both audible and visual signals be utilized to proceed past a red traffic control signal or stop sign. (Effective date: 1/1/2024)

### Public Act 103-0501 (SB1999)

#### ABANDONED INFANTS

Makes changes to the Abandoned Newborn Infant Protection Act regarding the requirements applicable to fire stations which accept a relinquished infant concerning the information which must be supplied to a person relinquishing an infant. Note: This bill will apply to districts which have a fire station serving as a receiving point for an abandoned newborn. (Effective date: 1/1/2024)

### Public Act 103-0521 (HB1595)

#### EMS SYSTEMS DISPUTE RESOLUTION

This bill amends the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Systems Act to add a definition of a "Silver Spanner Program"; provide for union representation or legal representation at an interview or investigation by an EMS medical director of an individual; makes changes regarding the composition of the "Regional EMS Advisory Committee;" revises requirements for an EMS Medical Director in connection with a suspension order; provides for union representation or legal representation of an individual interviewed during or investigated by a local system review board or the Department of Public Health; requires notification by the Medical Director to an individual being investigated of the right to have union representation and legal counsel at the interview; makes provisions for a member of a collective bargaining union for a fire service or work under a Silver Spanner Program. (Effective date: 1/1/2024)

### Public Act 103-0547 (SB0761)

#### ALTERNATIVE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

Amends the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Systems Act to make changes regarding scope of practice for various licensed EMS personnel. Makes changes regarding the level of care which is required for a patient to be transported and for initial medical assessment; makes provisions for out of state disaster deployments; creates the EMT Training, Recruitment, And Retention Task Force; calls for the submission of a

final report to the General Assembly and Governor by 1/1/2024; allows for the use of EMR personnel with respect to ALS transports subject to approval the Illinois Department of Public Health; allows for the use of an "Ambulance Assistance Vehicle" to intercept a licensed ambulance in a pilot program approved by an EMS Medical Director. (Effective date: 8/11/2023)

### SJR 0007 Senate Joint Resolution 0007

#### FIREFIGHTERS TASKFORCE

Creates the Recruiting & Retaining Public Employee Firefighters and Paramedics Task Force with the purpose of identifying solutions to address the shortage of applicants for the positions of firefighter and/or paramedic by the examination of various factors. It requires the filing of report to the General Assembly and Governor no later than January 1, 2024.

#### NEW MABAS CONTRACT DEADLINE.

Districts which are members of MABAS are reminded that MABAS put forward a new agreement in 2022 for membership in the organization with a deadline of January 1, 2024 for execution (approval and signature) by members to continue their membership status in MABAS. Districts which are members and desire to continue membership should take action to formally (by Board action) approve the new agreement by ordinance or resolution and submit that approval and the signed new agreement to their MABAS Division or directly to MABAS prior to the deadline. ■

## Congratulations!

### IAFPD 2023 Legislator of the Year

#### Senator Christopher Belt 57th District

The interests of our members are important when legislation is proposed and considered in the General Assembly. It is Senator Belt's accessibility and cooperation with our legislative team and serving as lead sponsor on essential legislation we recognize his efforts.

