

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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No Time Like the Present

For lawmakers, summer and fall during a non-election year is as close as they get to having downtime. Which makes it the perfect time for fire protection districts to engage in relationship building. As the world slowly but steadily resumes in-person activities, opportunities to build relationships with legislators should be top of mind.

Look at your calendar for the next six months and try to identify opportunities and reasons to reach out to your representative and senator. I'm a native of central Illinois, and not a weekend passes without a small town having an annual summer festival. With summer festivals come fundraising efforts, often by our member districts. Summer festivals and their activities are the perfect excuse to invite your local lawmakers to your fundraiser or activity booth.

If you have an upcoming training session for your firefighters, invite your legislators to observe. Give them a tour of your station, host a coffee meet and greet, or simply request a meeting to talk about local issues of importance to your district. Remember, these are your representatives in Springfield; they want to know what is happening in their district and those they represent.

Summer and fall are legislators time to be in their districts, and the first opportunity since the beginning of the pandemic to fully engage with their constituents. There are many timely topics to discuss with legislators: implementation of pension consolidation, the influx (of lack thereof) of federal stimulus funds to local governments, and increased awareness of mental health issues for first responders are just a few examples of issues of

importance to fire protection districts and the General Assembly. These issues provide a reason to request a conversation with your representative or senator in their district office. As IAFPD's lobbyist, I am always available to assist members to prepare for legislative meetings with materials, talking points and advice.

Social media also provides a wealth of opportunities to document legislative advocacy to the benefit of our districts, the Association and legislators. Be sure to take photos to be posted on your district's website and social media accounts and share with your legislators' communications staff.

I have advocated in this column previously about the need to develop relationships with legislators at the district level. The issue is so important it bears repeating. Lobbying during a pandemic

has reinforced the value of constituent/legislator relationships to successful legislative advocacy. Without the ability to physically be present at the Capitol for most of the past sixteen months, constituent outreach was critical in elevating our issues. Hearing from a constituent always makes a message more personal and brings local perspective.

As the world and state reopens, we can communicate in person once again. I cannot wait to return to the Capitol and talk with legislators face-to-face on IAFPD's issues. But pandemic or not, personal relationships with lawmakers at the district level are critical to legislative success. There is no time like the present to think about how to grow those relationships within your fire protection and legislative districts. The effort you put in now will pay off in the future. ■



We need your vote to elect John Perry (Lisle-Woodridge FPD) to the Illinois Firefighters Pension Investment Fund (IFPIF) Board.

Fire Districts are not provided a seat at the negotiation table nor were they consulted for input when the new pension legislation was created and passed in 2019. There are over 100 fire districts in Illinois, who represent hundreds of communities that we serve, and it is important that we have a voice in this very important pension funding process. The IFPIF Board is responsible for all future actuarial reporting to determine our annual pension cost and the investment of our pension funds. Representative fairness is what we need now.

Please watch for the ballot to arrive at the Fire District Offices as they will be mailed on August 20th. Once the ballot arrives, the District Board President should vote for John Perry! Return the completed ballot by September 14 to allow ample time for the delayed mail service.

Thank you! John Perry - Lisle-Woodridge FPD - perry@lwfd.org