

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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Lawmakers Enter the Home Stretch

At this writing, the Illinois General Assembly has roughly one month of session remaining. Both chambers have observed Third Reading deadline for their own bills, and most legislation that has been approved in the chamber of origin is in the second chamber awaiting committee votes. Here we review bills that are still moving through the process that will impact fire protection districts.

Two bills initiated by IAFPD have been approved in the House and are currently in the Senate. House Bill 1625 (Swanson/Anderson) will change the requirement in the Fire Protection District Act that districts who plan to sell surplus real property must obtain an MAI appraisal. Because MAI (Member, Appraisal Institute) certification is a higher level of certification, MAI appraisals are more difficult to obtain and more expensive. With the passage of House Bill 1625, districts may get an MAI appraisal, or an appraisal prepared by a state licensed and certified appraiser. This makes the Fire Protection District Act consistent with what is currently in statute for municipalities, park district and road districts.

House Bill 1626 (Swanson/Villivalam) will raise the bidding threshold in Section 11(k) of the Fire Protection District Act from the current \$20,000 to \$30,000. This mirrors legislation that was enacted in 2022 for townships and will be particularly helpful to districts in maximizing small equipment grants from the Office of the State Fire Marshal, which have a maximum grant amount of \$26,000.

Legislation to allow municipalities and fire protection districts to charge reasonable fees for responding to lift assist calls from long term care facilities has been introduced as House Bill 2216 (Kelly). HB 2216 is an initiative of the Illinois Municipal League but is strongly supported by IAFPD. While the bill has not had a committee hearing, it has a deadline extension through the scheduled adjournment date of May 19, 2023 and has picked up bi-partisan cosponsors.

House Bill 2972 (Davidsmeyer/Tracy) will provide that a rescue squad district may fix, charge, and collect fees for rescue squad services and ambulance services within or outside of the rescue squad district not exceeding the reasonable cost of the service. This legislation has been introduced by the sponsor for the past few years and this is the first time it has successfully passed the House. IAFPD has worked with the sponsor to support the bill and we look forward to its consideration in the Senate.

On the Senate side, four bills are moving that will impact fire service. Senate Bill 761 (Lightford/Welch) creates the EMT Training, Recruitment, and Retention Task Force. The task force would be administered by the Illinois Department of Public Health and would be required to submit a report of its findings to the Governor and General Assembly by January 1, 2024. A similar measure is Senate Joint Resolution 7 (Joyce) which creates the Recruiting & Retaining Public Employee Firefighters and Paramedics Task Force and includes an appointee

for IAFPD. Both measures recognize the significant challenges that fire and emergency services face in staffing and recruitment.

Senate Bill 1251 (Johnson/Hoffman) will require ambulances to use both lights and sirens when driving through an intersection where other vehicles or pedestrians are present. The legislation was prompted by a fatal crash in the sponsor's district where circumstances prevented the victim from seeing the emergency lights. IAFPD was part of a coalition including the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, the AFFI and ambulance providers that worked with the sponsor to craft an amendment that addressed the concerns of the fire service. The bill was amended to require training on siren use by operators and to require that use of signals be in accordance with the current law.

Finally, Senate Bill 1611 (Joyce/Didech) will allow for state employees to take up to 200 hours of paid leave to participate in training necessary to obtain Basic Operations Firefighter certification from the State Fire Marshal as well as 80 hours of annual training for courses that will lead to additional certification. SB 1611 is an initiative of the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association intended to support their recruitment and retention efforts. While the bill has met some resistance from the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, the two sides have worked through several issues and the bill has passed the House. ■