

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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Catching Up on Firefighter and EMT Task Forces

Last October, I used this column to inform members about two legislative task forces intended to improve first responder recruitment and retention. Several months later, we are due for an update on how these task forces are working and what they hope to accomplish.

Senate Joint Resolution 7, passed in May 2023 created the Recruiting and Retaining Public Employee Firefighters and Paramedics Task Force. The resolution originally included a deadline of January 1, 2024 for the task force to meet at least five times and develop a report to the General Assembly and Governor. Due to delayed appointments for a variety of reasons, the task force's deadline to produce a report was moved back from the original January 2024 deadline to January 1, 2025.

The sponsors of SJR 7, Senator Patrick Joyce (D-Kankakee) and Representative Michael Kelly (D-Chicago) are serving as the two co-chairs. Other legislator appointments are Senator Neil Anderson (R-Aledo) who is a Moline FD firefighter and paramedic, and Representative Jackie Haas (R-Kankakee).

Former State Representative and Knoxville Fire Protection District Trustee Don Moffitt was appointed by House Republican Leader Tony McCombie to represent IAFPD on the Task Force on August 31, 2023. According to Moffitt, the Task Force has met the required number of times, meeting on October 24, 2023, December 5, 2023, January 16, 2024, March 5, 2024 and most recently on May 1, 2025. Meetings have been held at a variety of locations

provided by the various organizations that make up the task force, including the Illinois Municipal League, the AFFI, and the Office of the State Fire Marshal which provides members with administrative support.

Moffitt reports that the members of the task force quickly developed a rapport and that he believes the discussion has been fruitful. A review of task force meeting minutes demonstrates a broad discussion with many ideas offered and deliberated. At the first meeting in October, Senator Joyce referenced the report of the 2012 Emergency Medical Services Task Force, which IAFPD member Don Moffitt chaired as a State Representative, as a road map for the current task force. A primary focus of the group was the need to find an easier pathway to EMS licensure, including standardized rules for each EMS region.

Members also recognized that generational differences and the priorities of Gen Z and Millennial candidates must be taken into consideration in recruitment. Examples offered of programs that are working to engage a younger and more diverse workforce include Camp Empower, a Bolingbrook-based program geared toward future female firefighters, and an apprenticeship program in Peoria that focuses on recruiting 18–21-year-olds. One point of consensus among members was that lowering the eligibility age to nineteen should be considered.

According to Laura Bedolla of the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the task force is still finalizing their report and recommendations to lawmakers and the

Governor's office. Bedolla shared that "the Task Force members bring a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the industry, and they are eager to continue these conversations," adding that members of the public are invited to attend meetings and provide comment. Depending on when the report is finalized, we could see recommendations become legislative measures next spring.

While the task force created by SJR 7 was focused on firefighters, a similar body was created last spring to look at the same issues for EMTs in Senate Bill 761. Like the firefighter task force, the deadline for the EMT Training, Recruitment and Retention Task Force was moved back from its original deadline to September 1, 2024. The EMT task force includes nine appointees by the Senate President, and it appears that those appointments have yet to be made. It is unclear if the task force has met but as a statutorily created body it is required to complete its work. Hopefully we will see movement on the EMT Task Force in the coming months. ■