

## Sponsor Testimony on HB 575

### Volunteer Firefighter/EMT Tax Credit

Representative Candice Keller/Representative Rezabek

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on behalf of HB 575, the volunteer firefighter/EMT tax credit. Before I began research on this bill, I was unaware of the critical needs of the firefighter/EMT community. It was not until I began to meet these men and women face-to-face that I saw their bravery, heroism, and their immense needs that go unmet.

These folks face staffing shortages, broken or missing equipment, and in the case of volunteers little to no compensation. However, they still do their job every day for the protection of our lives and property. This is why I have come forward today with HB 575. While it is not a complete fix of the problems the firefighting community faces, it is a beginning to show some token of appreciation to these amazing individuals.

HB 575 is a simple, straightforward bill. Essentially, volunteer firefighters/EMTs will receive a refundable tax credit each year, based on their years of service. Those who have served between 1-5 years will be eligible to receive \$500 per year off their taxes, \$1000 for those who have served 6-10 years, and \$2000 per year for those who have served 11 years or more.

There are tiers to this credit for a very specific reason—longevity. There is great expense in equipping and training these men and women stepping up as volunteers. Many times, they will have to take time off from their jobs or families to receive training, and keep in mind these men and women have to receive the exact same training as career firefighters with the same number of hours.

Then after all these expenses of time and money, it has become difficult to keep volunteers. According to the latest numbers from the Ohio Department of Public Safety, there has been a decrease of over 1,700 volunteers since 2013, leaving many fire departments in a bind. An example of this was one story conveyed to me by a fire chief from Adams County. They were responding to a structure fire in an Amish community. It ended up that they required eight departments to send mutual aid to fight the blaze. Out of the nine departments total responding to that fire, there were only a total of 12 firefighters assisting.

While one's mindset may be about the cost associated with such a tax credit, let me show you how currently volunteer firefighters/EMTs are saving the Ohio taxpayer a large amount. According to the state fire marshal's office, there are 467 volunteer fire departments around our state. If we staffed each department with only 2 firefighters (best practice says four should be on staff at all times) 24 hours a day, and we paid them each a minimum wage of \$8.30 per hour, that works out to approximately \$67million per year. In contrast, if all 11,292 volunteers around the state apply for the highest credit (\$2,000) that would be approximately \$22million per year. That comes to an approximate savings of \$45million.

I am honored that so many fire chiefs and organizations from around the state have rallied behind this legislation. We have received the support of the Ohio Fire Chief's Association, Ohio Firefighters' Association, Brothers Helping Brothers, the Village of Botkins, Ohio, the Village of Georgetown, Ohio, as well numerous chiefs, lieutenants, and firefighters across the Buckeye state.

**Rep. Rezabek:**

One of the fire chiefs Representative Keller had mentioned is Chief Gary Taylor of the Camden Somers Township Volunteer Fire District, who is a constituent of mine. Both he and Nick Magoteaux brought this legislation to my attention, which I am happy to support before you today. Nick is a founder of the organization Brothers Helping Brothers, which aims to aide and assist EMT and fire departments in need. Both men have shown great support behind this legislation, and I am honored to do the same.

With that, we would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.