

LINDSEY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

RUSS ZIMMERMAN, CHIEF DAVE ZIMMERMAN, ASST. CHIEF JASON CONKLIN, DEPUTY CHIEF

May 22, 2018

Chairman Schaffer, Vice-Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways & Means Committee, my name is Jason Conklin. I have been a firefighter for the Lindsey Volunteer Fire Department for the past 24 years and have served as Deputy Chief for the past seven years. On behalf of all our volunteer firefighters, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 575.

The Lindsey Volunteer Fire Department is in Sandusky County, about 35 miles southeast of Toledo. Our department's rural response area covers 55 square miles which consists of 91% agricultural production, 4% industrial/commercial, and 5% residential. Our department is our community's first line of defense for emergency situations that include fire, rescue, medical, hat-mat, ice and water rescue, confined space rescue, and severe weather.

No matter what type of response, time of day, or location of a call, one thing is always constant: ***Our volunteer firefighters will respond.*** As with many volunteer agencies, finding volunteers who are willing to give their time with little, or in our case, no compensation, has been one of our department's greatest challenges now and for the foreseeable future.

Currently, our department has 27 dedicated volunteer firefighters who drop everything, in a moment's notice, to respond in a person's greatest time of need. Since our department's formation in 1945, we have been a 100% volunteer agency. The passion and dedication of our firefighters that serve our community is evident by the fact that our department's average years of service is 21, with members ranging from three years to 63 years of service. However, we have seen a disproportionate number of new firefighters joining the department compared to the number of firefighters retiring. Within the past two years, four firefighters, with an average 35 years of service, retired while only two new firefighters joined.

Additionally, over the past four years, we have seen a 25% increase in the number of calls for help. Between 2009 and 2013, the department's average call volume was 91. Since 2014, it has been 121. This increase of 30 calls per year equates to an additional 60 hours of time, per firefighter, volunteered each year. This is important to note, because many of our firefighters can leave work but are not compensated while they are gone. Although we receive tremendous support from our community, our meager budget does not allow us to compensate our firefighters for their time and/or costs associated with being on our department. Some of the out of pocket costs paid by our firefighters include maintenance and fuel used in their personal vehicles for all fire department calls and functions. In addition to responding to calls, our firefighters also spend hundreds of hours training, fundraising, performing community safety outreach and education, and general fire department operational items such as weekly truck checks and station maintenance.

The passage of HB 575 would make an immediate, positive impact on the Lindsey Volunteer Fire Department, and our community, by allowing us to offer some monetary incentives to recruit new firefighters, while giving our existing firefighters a tax credit that could be used to compensate them for some of their out of pocket expenses and/or lost wages from time away from work. ***Without our volunteers, there would not be a Lindsey Volunteer Fire Department.***

Again, thank you for your time and I hope that my testimony has shown you how the passage of HB 575 will substantially benefit our community and our firefighters.

Sincerely,



Jason Conklin
Deputy Chief

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