



OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION

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HB 143 - Volunteer First Responders

Proponent Testimony

April 30, 2019

House Ways & Means Committee

Good afternoon Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Lipps, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways & Means Committee. My name is Heidi Fought, and I am the Assistant Executive Director of the Ohio Township Association. On behalf of the Ohio Township Association (OTA), I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you as a proponent of House Bill 143.

To provide a little perspective, volunteers comprise 71 percent of firefighters in the United States and save local communities of all sizes an estimated nearly \$140 billion a year. Of the total number of volunteer firefighters, 95 percent work in communities with a population of 25,000 or less. Volunteer firefighters provide the first line of defense for many types of emergencies, including fires, emergency medical incidents, terrorist events, natural disasters, and other general public service calls. However, recent reports demonstrate that the number of volunteer firefighters has drastically declined and that this decline stems from difficulties in recruiting and retaining these essential volunteers. Reasonable financial incentives for volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel serve as important recruitment and retention tools for local emergency response departments who are struggling to meet increased demand.

Townships and the people they serve depend highly on volunteers to provide safety services – fire, EMS, and police – for their residents. Unfortunately, increased costs of training and equipment discourage many individuals from volunteer service. The OTA believes that some form of tax relief would be an excellent incentive for volunteers in safety services.

The concept behind HB 143 is not new. In fact, in the 123rd, 124th, and 128th General Assemblies legislation was introduced that would have provided either a tax deduction (HB 213/SB 71 123rd GA) or a tax credit (HB 148 124th GA, HB 255 128th GA, and HB 575 132nd GA). Similar to HB 575 from the last General Assembly, HB 143 would provide a tax credit for all volunteer first responders.

It is worth noting that the National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT), a national organization to which the OTA belongs, is also requesting a tax incentive for volunteer first responders at the federal level.

With the ranks of volunteer personnel declining but still critically needed, the state should provide small incentives to these volunteers who risk their lives for little or no compensation. The cost of these incentives to the state government would be minimal compared to the estimated cost savings provided by volunteer emergency services.

The Ohio Township Association supports HB 143 and we strongly encourage your support as well. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon and I would be happy to answer any questions you or committee members may have.