



ENON - MAD RIVER TOWNSHIP FIRE AND EMS DEPARTMENT

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Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the State and Local Government Committee, I would like to personally thank you for allowing me to give my testimony on House Bill 564.

First and foremost, I would like to give you some information about myself. I was hoping to do this in person, but unfortunately due to low staffing I am currently on duty at the Mad River Township Fire Department as I type this. I began my fire career at the age of 18 when I became a volunteer firefighter for the local fire department. I had occupied a cadet status prior to that from the age of 15. I worked for 2 agencies as a volunteer firefighter in Champaign County for 6 years. In that 6 years I saw a steady decline in the number of individuals entering into the fire service, and a rapid increase of those exiting/retiring. In 2019 I started as a firefighter at Mad River Township Fire and EMS in Enon, Ohio after a severe staffing crisis. I was not from the area, and came solely because the agency needed help, and I was qualified. Shortly after I gained my Swift Water Rescue Technician, Public Safety SCUBA Diver, and most importantly my EMT-Basic in late 2019.

Fast forward to early 2020. As a new EMT whom had been in this field for several years I began to witness more and more individuals whom were inexplicably ill, and would rapidly and violently decline. Patients whom would be taken to the hospital for "cold and flu like symptoms" would be on ventilated life support only a few hours later. This was the precursor to COVID-19, and the waves to follow. For two years the line has been held with staffing continuing to fall. Whether it was illness, disease, post traumatic stress, or just stress in general, the number of individuals exiting the fire service became overwhelmingly rapid. So overwhelmingly rapid that even the Ohio Board of EMS at one point even waived the need for new EMT students to take the National Registry exam until a later date and time in an attempt to get them on the road faster and running calls for local agencies whom were near closing their doors.

This is where the issue at hand begins to shine through. Staffing. At the beginning of COVID-19 I was a 911 dispatcher. This was a position that I had held in both a full time and part time capacity throughout my career with a local agency. I had the potential to make \$21.50 an hour and work over 40+ hours in a week as a full-time employee. With that being said I knowingly and willingly resigned from that position to work as a part-time firefighter/EMT making less than \$15.00 per hour. I did this because of a need. My departments needed me, the residents needed me. I couldn't stand by and listen to calls go unanswered due to staffing issues. People were calling 911. They still needed US. And myself, and a

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few others were there to attempt to make a dent in the staggering numbers of overwhelming calls, not only at my agency but across the state.

Over time this flow of work, and more work began to wear on those around us. My best friend of 10+ years, the sole person responsible for putting me in the fire service and ultimately in front of you today resigned "for good" after suffering from potential PTSD as well as depression, anxiety and nearly losing his marriage to effects of what he endured during this pandemic. I, myself, have been near the breaking point of hanging up the helmet that I have worn, and putting the work that I have done for the last 10 years of my life solely due to the stress of being understaffed and underpaid for what we have had to endure. The physical and mental strain became enough, let alone the risk of illness. Working EMS in the times of short staffing and a pandemic was an absolute rollercoaster of low and high morale. The old lady that you took to the hospital with a slight cough, who was in high spirits and hopeful, would be dead 2 days later, another family planning a funeral. This was a pattern that became all too common. Add to that the stress of contracting the illness, and taking it home to your family. An illness that had killed so many. It was only a matter of time, and that is exactly what happened.

On Sunday June 28th, 2020 I was exposed to my first confirmed COVID positive patient. By July 4th, 2020 I was bed ridden with COVID-19. Myself positive with the risk of spreading it to my fiancé whom is also an EMT, and two children (at the time, now a third). This was a pattern that continued. I contracted COVID 1 more time in 2021, and my fiancé also contracted it in early 2022. I have lasting respiratory issues in relation to it (COVID).

Now that you understand a bit of the pattern of the last few years I want to focus on not only the present, but more importantly the future. Currently shifts are being uncovered. 911 response is delayed. And sadly those whom have held the line the last 2 years are at our limits. Currently the State of Ohio allows us 1,500 hours annually. What does this mean to us? To put it into perspective I will use myself and my hours currently. As I type this statement I am working a 20 hour shift. With that being said as of this morning prior to my clocking in, I have worked 535 hours and 55 minutes from Jan 1 2022 at 5:00 am to March 30 2022 at 5:00 am. In this time I have personally responded to 106 calls on and off duty. At this rate come September I will be unable to work for my part time agency. Not only that but I will be unable to answer for "off duty" calls due to still being paid for that time. What does that mean? It means that even in times of short staffing I will have to make a choice, as well as my employers. Do I cut back my hours setting me off financially, leaving shifts that I usually work uncovered, and my

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family having to figure out another way to make those funds? Or do I continue to work these hours to protect my tax paying citizens, knowing that eventually it will force my hand to be without only 6 months later?

Or more importantly here is the question for you. As a citizen of a township, or other locality, would you rather have 911 response now? Or later?

It is 3 am and your home is on fire. Your child, grandchild, or spouse is trapped in an upstairs bedroom. You have no way to get to them, and help is coming from 15 minutes further away because of the current 1500-hour rule and low staffing. Are you willing to place your lives, and your loved ones lives at risk for the sake of saving a few more tax dollars? This is not what we responders want. **WE WANT TO BE THERE.** We just will be forced not to be as time moves on. Join our ranks in combating this staffing shortage, and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our citizens, your constituents, as we move forward through this year. With the majority of The State of Ohio being rural with volunteer/part-time agencies without your actions today, tomorrow, and forward this pattern will not only continue but will worsen.

As someone whom wants to be there, who loves this job, and the people that I serve I ask for you to stand with us in support of House Bill 564. Help us, help you.

I close with this quote:

“Always have a willing hand to help someone, you might be the only one that does.”

- Roy T. Bennett

I appreciate your time and sincerely apologize that I could not be there in person today. I was excited to speak with you all, but again unfortunately due to low staffing I either worked, or we would not be available to the public in our full capacity.

Please feel free to contact me for any questions, or concerns.

Respectfully and Thankfully,
Lieutenant Cody L. Stanley
Mad River Township Fire Department
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