



Tim Schaffer  
20th District

**Ohio Senate**  
Senate Building  
Room 137, First Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
(614) 466-8076  
sd20@ohiosenate.gov

**Committees:**  
Agriculture & Natural Resources, Chair  
Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Public Safety  
Energy  
Rules and Reference  
Transportation, Vice Chair  
Ways and Means

**Special Appointments**  
Ohio Expositions Commission  
State Emergency Response Commission

**Senate Finance Committee**  
**Senate Bill 195 — Sponsor Testimony**  
**Tuesday, October 21, 2025**

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 195.

This legislation was created with the help of Ohio State Fire Marshal, Kevin Reardon, and was based on the Ohio Task Force on Volunteer Fire Service report from January 5, 2023. The goal of this legislation is to take the recommendations from that report and put them into action.

The truth of the matter is this: Ohio's rural, volunteer fire departments are in crisis and struggling. Most of these departments have unpaid personnel and are using outdated equipment and infrastructure to address today's challenges. If we do not step in and provide meaningful reforms, we will have a public safety crisis in rural Ohio on our hands. If we do nothing, then people may die or face severe, life-changing injuries because our rural volunteer fire departments are over-whelmed, understaffed, and don't have the resources that they need to serve the public.

Senate Bill 195 follows the recommendations from the January 5 Task Force report by doing the following:

- Improves upon the state employee paid public service leave increase from House Bill 96 for emergency medical and firefighting services. Thanks to the legislature's efforts earlier this year in House Bill 96, we moved from 40 hours to 120 hours. Senate Bill 195 will further increase the number of leave hours permitted from 120 hours to 192 hours per year.

*With God, all things are possible.*

- Allows volunteer firefighters with at least one year of service and their surviving spouses to be eligible for the Homestead property tax reduction. This reduction only applies to one homestead owned and occupied by a volunteer firefighter or their surviving spouse.
- Creates a new two academic year tuition waiver through the Ohio Department of Higher Education for approved volunteer firefighters to use at any state institution of higher education in Ohio. To qualify, a volunteer firefighter must enter into a written agreement to serve as a volunteer firefighter for a five-year period. There is a claw back provision in the bill should someone violate the terms of the agreement.
- Requires the State Fire Marshal to establish a grant program to assist funding volunteer fire department cadet programs, explorer programs, or both.
- Increases the amount of funding allocated from the foreign fire insurance company tax from 20% to 25%. This is not a tax increase; it just increases the minimum funding allotment to the State Fire Marshal's Fund from what is currently collected.
- Improves protections preventing volunteer firefighters and volunteer EMTs from being fired by their private employers for responding to an emergency or attending training. Wrongfully terminated employees also may file a civil lawsuit against an employer who violates these protections.
- Allows private employers the opportunity to allow up to 120 hours of paid public service leave per year to be used to respond to emergencies or attend training. Employees will be required to provide an employer with a written statement detailing their absence related to public service leave with the signature of the chief of the volunteer fire department or an equivalent organization.
- Creates definitions, training, and certification requirements for "fire apparatus driver operator" and "support person." These changes and separate distinctions allow individuals to volunteer in support roles without having to enter a burning building.

- Requires the Executive Director of the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services to develop alternative training programs for volunteer firefighters that combine in-person and online classes with an emphasis on coursework being completed and submitted online to the greatest extent possible.
- Creates the Full-Time Emergency Medical Service Response Fund with the Department of Public Safety with a \$5 million GRF appropriation over FY 2026 and FY 2027. This fund will be used to incentivize and support the formation of a full-time emergency medical service by volunteer fire departments with high EMS call volume. The funding will go toward pay of two full time EMTs or paramedics for three years with the requirement that the volunteer fire department maintain or improve the level of service provided over the three-year period.
- Creates a nonrefundable income tax credit for employers that provide paid volunteer firefighting leave benefits to an employee. This credit is capped at \$500 per eligible employee or \$5,000 total per eligible employer. This is primarily used to help small business owners who pay into the state income tax.
- Creates a nonrefundable income tax credit for volunteer firefighters that is equal to 50% of their aggregate tax liability for the year.
- Creates a new \$5 million GRF line item named the Community Assistance Program – Emergency Services under the Department of Commerce for FY 2026. This fund will be used to provide grants to volunteer fire departments for the construction or renovation of new or current facilities.

Simply put, Senate Bill 195 will create new incentives for employers and volunteer firefighters and EMTs. These changes will help support existing volunteers while encouraging the recruitment of new volunteers by making training, education, and financial assistance more accessible.

I will note for members of the committee that I am working on a substitute bill at the moment to reflect changes from House Bill 96 as well as other improvements to reflect feedback that I have received since this bill was introduced earlier this year.

Thank you once again Chairman Cirino and members of the committee for the opportunity to present this legislation to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.