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**Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association
House Bill 509**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Martin, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 509. My name is Brad French and I am a Captain with the Dayton Fire Department where one of my responsibilities is the oversight of accreditation. I am testifying today on behalf of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association where I serve as a member of the legislative committee.

The Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association continues to oppose the changes in continuing education for firefighters that were included in the House Passed version of HB 509 and has a new concern with another fire related provision in the recently released substitute bill.

Since 2008, Ohio has been a leader when it comes to firefighter education and training due to changes the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association worked with other fire service stakeholders to implement requiring a minimal level of continuing education hours for all of Ohio's firefighters. It is important to note that the changes to training and certification requirements were pursued collaboratively with stakeholders from all levels of the fire service, including career firefighters and volunteer firefighters.

Thanks to the efforts of Ohio's fire service, House Bill 401 of the 126th General Assembly was passed with both the House and Senate providing nearly unanimous support, to allow the Board of Emergency Medical Services (now the EMFTS Board) to adopt rules for firefighter training in consultation with the Board's Firefighter & Fire Safety Inspector Training Committee. This committee is made up of fire professionals who understand the challenges facing the fire service in Ohio and are in the best position to recommend rules that ensure firefighter safety without being overly burdensome.

Unlike some of the other professional certifications that you are reviewing, adequately training firefighters has a direct impact on saving lives and keeping your constituents safe. The current requirement of 54 hours of continuing education over a three-year certification cycle, or 1.5 hours of training per month, is a very low bar in a profession where inadequately trained firefighters are a serious risk to themselves and to the citizens of Ohio.

Over the past few months, the Ohio Task Force on Volunteer Fire Service, chaired by the State Fire Marshal, has been traveling the state and meeting with firefighters across Ohio to better understand the barriers to recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. They will be issuing a report in the coming weeks with recommendations on how the state can better support volunteer firefighters as well as any law changes that should be considered. To the extent that training requirements are a barrier for volunteers, that task force is in a great position to recommend appropriate updates to training requirements. Passing the current language in HB 509 related to firefighter continuing education would be a step backward for Ohio's fire service, and the OFCA opposes the provisions.

In the recently released substitute bill, a provision was included to merge the fire instructor certificate with live fire instructor certificate. The summary provided in the "Occupational License Review Report" indicated that this was done in order to "eliminate redundancy and increase efficiency", however there are consequences to this language that cause us serious concern.

The Live Fire Instructor certification ensures adequate preparation for any interested certified Fire Instructor who chooses to assume the additional responsibility and liability for safe planning, oversight, and execution of live burn scenarios. During these training scenarios, students are exposed to some of the most dangerous environments they will face during their careers.

Because these training scenarios are so serious, initial certification requirements for the Live Fire Instructor include a current fire instructor certificate and completion of an additional 24 hour "Live Fire Training – Operations Level Course" following the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for such training.

If implemented, this provision in HB 509 would force thousands of Ohio's currently certified fire instructors, who do not also hold a current Live Fire Instructor certification, to complete 24 hours of instruction and complete all job performance requirements within twelve months of course completion. This would require significant time and money for thousands of Ohio's fire instructors when they have not previously expressed any desire to provide this additional level of training.

The Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association asks that the provisions in House Bill 509 related to reductions in firefighter training and live fire instructor certification be removed from the bill. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.