



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN SHORTAGES

Room 412 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI

October 18, 2016
9:30 a.m. – 4:10 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the October 18, 2016 meeting of the Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages. The file copy of this summary has appended to it a copy of each document prepared for or submitted to the committee during the meeting. A digital recording of the meeting is available on our Web site at <http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lc>.]

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Nass called the committee to order. The roll was called and a quorum was determined to be present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sen. Steve Nass, Chair; Rep. Jesse Kremer, Vice Chair; Sen. Janet Bewley; Rep. Debra Kolste; and Public Members John Eich, J. Timothy Hillebrand, Gregory Michalek, Jodie Olson, Jeff Rickaby, David Seager, Jr., Dana Sechler, James Small, Jody Stoker, Jay Tousey, and Gene Wright.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Margit Kelley, Senior Staff Attorney, and Andrea Brauer, Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Dave Finger, Chief of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, National Volunteer Fire Council; Severo A. Rodriguez, Executive Director and CEO, National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians; Dr. Morna Foy, President, Wisconsin Technical College System; John Will, President, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College; Jon Hoelter, Legislative Advisor, Department of Health Services (DHS); Bill Oemichen, Director, Office of Preparedness and Emergency Health Care, DHS; and James Newlun, EMS Section Chief, Emergency Medical Services Section, DHS.

Approval of the Minutes from the Committee's September 20, 2016 Meeting

The committee unanimously approved the minutes of the committee's September 20, 2016 meeting.

**Presentation by Dave Finger, Chief of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs,
National Volunteer Fire Council**

Mr. Finger presented national data and trends for volunteer firefighters. He reported that, nationally, the number of volunteer firefighters is slowly declining, while the average age of volunteers is increasing. Mr. Finger stated that recruitment difficulties result from a lack of people, time, and resources. He further identified the need for good leadership and strong community support. He then described the National Volunteer Fire Council's "Make Me a Firefighter" recruitment campaign. The campaign focuses on outreach, commitment, training, and retention, and is available online for free. Mr. Finger also provided comments on options before the committee, including length of service awards, employment flexibility, and options for addressing training costs. Following the presentation, the committee members asked Mr. Finger questions about his organization and his thoughts on addressing volunteer shortages. He emphasized the value in showing appreciation, making people feel they are part of a team, and providing good leadership.

Links to the PowerPoint slides and other materials from this meeting are available on the committee's website at: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/study/2016/1498>.

**Presentation by Severo A. Rodriguez, Executive Director and CEO, National Registry
of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT)**

Mr. Rodriguez presented to the committee about the role and function of NREMT. He reported 46 states require NREMT registration, and all states use the registry. Mr. Rodriguez described the current levels of NREMT certification and identified future changes to NREMT standards. He stated NREMT charges \$70 for testing and \$15 for recertification. Mr. Rodriguez also presented data on exam passage rates and stated Wisconsin has performed well compared to the national average. He then discussed NREMT's psychomotor exam and computerized adaptive test. In particular, he explained how the questions are developed and calibrated, how the computerized adaptive test works, and how the exams are administered. He commented on steps NREMT takes to tie the exams to professional competence, and described NREMT's role as attesting to baseline competency. Following the presentation, the committee members asked questions about NREMT's function and impact.

Presentation by Representatives of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges

Dr. Morna Foy, President, Wisconsin Technical College System

John Will, President, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College

Dr. Foy and Mr. Will introduced themselves, and Mr. Will described his role as President of the Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College. They described steps the technical colleges have already taken to follow the recommendations outlined in Draft/1, *Letter to the Wisconsin Technical College System and Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association*. Dr. Foy encouraged the committee to move forward with the letter.

Dr. Foy also discussed two of the bill drafts, which have been presented to the committee for consideration. She first discussed LRB-0236/P1, which relates to registration priority for certain courses offered at technical colleges. She stated that the priority of the technical colleges

is to serve district workforce needs, and that the needs of each district's taxpayers is reflected in the district college's programs and policies. Regarding LRB-0235/P1, which relates to minimum enrollment requirements for certain courses offered at technical colleges, Dr. Foy stated that limiting enrollment requirements would decrease flexibility in making fiscally sound class offerings, and could in the long-run decrease the total number of people the technical colleges can train. She also stated the statutes do not specify enrollment numbers in any other context.

Dr. Foy commented that the option in Memo No. 2 to allow volunteers to defer emergency medical services (EMS) tuition costs would add administrative costs for the technical colleges because it could require them to track and pursue payments. She stated potential solutions to alleviate volunteer shortages would be to make credentials and training more accessible, expand delivery options, provide more leadership training, and reshape public perception about the professions, with many of these ideas already being considered by the committee.

Presentation by Representatives of the Department of Health Services

Jon Hoelter, Legislative Advisor

Bill Oemichen, Director, Office of Preparedness and Emergency Health Care

James Newlun, EMS Section Chief, Emergency Medical Services Section

Mr. Hoelter, Mr. Oemichen, and Mr. Newlun provided a 50-state comparison of various aspects of EMS licensure and certification, including: NREMT use, electronic licensing systems, agency affiliation or credentialing requirements, application fees, and renewal periods. Mr. Newlun described efforts DHS has taken to reach out to services, providers, and training centers across Wisconsin through, for example, listening sessions and director courses. Mr. Hoelter, Mr. Oemichen, and Mr. Newlun then answered questions from committee members about DHS's program and the bill drafts.

Discussion of Bill Drafts and Letter Draft

Chair Nass postponed the discussion of the bill drafts and letter draft until the committee's next meeting.

Presentation by Legislative Council Committee Staff

Memo No. 2, *Options for Legislation Regarding Volunteer Recruitment and Retention, and Collaborative Organizations* (October 6, 2016)

Ms. Kelley and Ms. Brauer described the options for legislation, which were summarized in Memo No. 2, *Options for Legislation Regarding Volunteer Recruitment and Retention, and Collaborative Organizations*, dated October 6, 2016. These options have been presented to the committee through testimony, committee discussion, and other correspondence with committee staff. Ms. Kelley and Ms. Brauer briefly described current law and existing programs as they relate to the options in the Memo.

Discussion of Options for Legislation

Based on committee discussion and general consensus, Chair Nass directed that the following topics would remain open for consideration and discussion by the committee:

- Increase the annual matching amount paid by the state for each length of service award.
- Reduce the age or years of service required for vesting in the length of service award program.
- Create a tax credit for employers who permit volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel to leave work to respond to an emergency call.
- Expand the types of training for which the emergency medical technician (EMT)-basic portion of funds from the DHS-administered funding assistance program may be used to include first responder level training and continuing education.
- Permit EMS services to use funding assistance program funds to pay for NREMT initial and recertification fees.
- Create a charitable tax credit for hours served by volunteer firefighters or EMS personnel and for course hours in training or continuing education.
- Create a charitable tax credit for costs associated with volunteer duties. Costs could include out-of-pocket unreimbursed gear and equipment purchases, out-of-pocket unreimbursed mileage to obtain training and continuing education, or unreimbursed books and supplies purchased for training or continuing education.
- Allow active volunteer firefighters or EMS personnel to obtain a specialty license plate at no charge.
- Specify that a fire department or EMS provider may not prohibit its employees from volunteering as a firefighter or EMT with a volunteer fire department or EMS provider.
- Authorize the creation of fire and EMS districts as special purpose districts under state law, which serve as distinct local units of government, as bodies corporate and politic, if adopted by resolution of any two or more municipalities.
- Modify the EMS service credentialing requirement to allow greater fluidity of EMS personnel between EMS providers. For example, allow single credentialing within Healthcare Coalition (HCC) regions or health service areas identified by the Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) program.
- Direct DHS to create a staffing management program to utilize an existing database of all credentialed EMS personnel in the state, which can be sorted in multiple ways, including by training level or geographic area.
- Authorize a higher level of staffing for a call response than an ambulance service's licensing level.

- Authorize a dynamic licensing level for an ambulance service provider to provide one level of service during weekday business hours and a different level of service on nights and weekends.

Based on committee discussion and general consensus, Chair Nass directed that the following topics would not remain open for consideration:

- Regarding employment flexibility, expand protected absences from work to include responding to a declared state of emergency.
- Require employers to allow an employee to have a planned unpaid absence to obtain training or continuing education as a volunteer firefighter or EMS personnel.
- Revise the formula used for the funding assistance program to be weighted in favor of distributing funds to volunteer EMS providers.
- Defer EMS training tuition payments for students who are sponsored by a volunteer EMS provider. Allow the sponsoring provider or municipality to make quarterly payments on behalf of the sponsored student in lieu of the student's direct tuition payments to a technical college.
- Expand the Health Professions Loan Assistance Program to provide EMS training loan assistance for EMS personnel who agree to practice in rural areas or with volunteer EMS providers.
- Authorize participating local employers to make contributions to the Wisconsin Retirement System on behalf of volunteer firefighters and EMTs.
- Present a "years of service" citation award from the state to volunteer, or all, firefighters and EMTs who have served a certain number of years.
- Create an annual EMS commemoration day or other recognition event for volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel.
- Direct the Department of Safety and Professional Services and DHS to create initiatives to promote volunteering with fire departments and EMS providers.
- Direct DHS to create a listserv that would provide a resource group for fire chiefs and EMS directors regarding leadership, regional cooperation, and other management issues for EMS providers.
- Specify that volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel are eligible for BadgerCare Plus without having to meet the Medical Assistance program's financial eligibility requirements.
- Authorize EMT recruitment programs through local AHECs.
- Modify the requirement that an ambulance service provider operate within a primary service area to authorize cooperative responses by multiple providers.

- Allow EMS personnel to continue to accompany a patient when care has already begun, even if the individual is not credentialed with the service that sends the ambulance.
- Require mutual aid agreements to include cross-credentialing of all EMS personnel covered by an agreement.
- Authorize advanced EMTs or EMT-paramedics to be dispatched in non-transport vehicles (commonly referred to as “chase cars”) to work along with a first responder or ambulance at the location of the call.
- Authorize advanced EMTs or EMT-paramedics to be dispatched in non-transport vehicles to “intercept” and join a transporting vehicle.

Discussion of Committee Assignment

There was no other discussion of the committee assignment.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Plans for Future Meetings

Chair Nass has scheduled the next meeting of the Study Committee for Tuesday, November 15, 2016.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

AB:jal