

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The mission of the Legislative Committee is to provide focus, representation and visibility for the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association in legislative activities by advocating, supporting, sponsoring, opposing and actively participating in the legislative process involving those issues, areas or proposals as directed by the President of the Association.

The 2017 legislative session was the first year of the biennium which means that all of the newly elected house and senate members were installed, committees were re-organized and any bill that was not heard this year will carry over to next year's session. This also means that it was a budget year which consumed most of the legislators time. The budget actually came down to the last minutes to get passed and then extended into a four day special session in order to get accomplished.

If anyone thinks the budget process in their fire department is

difficult or messy, I would encourage you to follow one state budget process and you will likely have a much different perspective afterwards. As the budget took much of the legislators time, that meant it also took a lot of the legislative committees time and effort, it also put many of our legislative initiatives on the back burner. Our biggest budget priority is the fire safety account (FSA). This bill went through many iterations unfortunately. In the end the following allocations were made:

- State Fire Marshal's Office was allocated \$6,274,000 this year and \$6,408,000 in the second year (makes up for a loss in fed-

eral funding the second year)

- Minnesota Board of Firefighter Training and Education was allocated \$5,015,000 each of the two years which includes:
 - \$4,265,00 for firefighter training and education
 - \$500,000 for Task Force 1
 - \$250,000 for Minnesota Air Rescue Team
- Hazmat teams were appropriated \$850,000 each year and an additional \$675,000 were allocated to four Emergency Response Hazmat Teams. The additional funding was not requested by the Fire Safety Advisory Committee or recommended by the Minnesota Management and Analysis Development report about the response teams, but was allocated by a couple of legislators looking to fund their local team. This has set a new precedence of legislators setting funding priorities from the Fire Safety Account; we will need to have a unified plan moving forward so we do not have this happen again.

Another budget bill that passed included a provision that tax revenue from fireworks sale be distributed to the Fire Safety Account and the Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Account. Each of these accounts will get 25% of the fireworks tax revenue and the additional 50% will be deposited in the general fund. This was initially attached to the expansion of fireworks bill but throughout the committee process they were split into two bills. This means there will be some additional revenue to the Fire Safety Account. Currently the Fire Safety Account receives about \$13 million dollars of revenue annually from the insurance surcharge. I have not seen the fiscal note on the fireworks revenue but would anticipate the Fire Safety Account and Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Account will each see between \$50,000 and \$200,000 of additional revenue annually. While that sounds like a lot of additional money, in the grand scheme of things it does not go too far when it is spread out over state-wide initiatives.

Outside of the budget appropriations we did not get any of our major initiatives passed but we did have success partnering on many other bills and getting some bills introduced so they will be available for next year's session. The MNFIRE Initiative also has a legislative component that we continue to work on PTSD, Cancer and Line of Duty Death legislation with our partners.

One big initiative that we will need everyone's assistance with is passing the Fire Department Taxing District Authority which was introduced this year but not heard. This initiative would allow two or more local units of government to create a fire district with its own taxing authority. This would be similar to how school districts operate with their own tax levy and ability to bond. Many fire departments in states west of us operate very successfully under this model. We have a number of departments in our state interested in this initiative but it will take everyone's assistance to be successful as the current legislature is not apt to support another special taxing district. It is likely that each of these departments will then pursue special legislation to get their taxing authority set up. Currently most collaborative departments are set up through joint powers agreements/agencies which is not as stable of governance and funding as a taxing district. Given the makeup of Minnesota's Fire Service I think the taxing authority will be key to providing a sustainable path forward for many departments in the state. We will be discussing this issue more at the Chiefs Conference in Rochester this year. Please contact me if you would like more information or

are interested in assisting with this initiative.

Two of our big defensive positions were also successful this year. Again we held off the expansion of fireworks in Minnesota. The second perennial defensive position was the residential fire sprinkler ban.

We continue to have a great working relationship with our other association partners who make up MNFAC (Minnesota Fire Department Association, Fire Marshal's Association of Minnesota and International Association of Arson Investigators Minnesota Chapter) as well as the Minnesota Professional Firefighters. These relationships are key to providing a unified front from the fire service at the Capitol and the success of many initiatives. We also worked closely with the Minnesota Ambulance Association and the Builders Association of Minnesota on bills this session.

As you are reading this, the committee has already started to work on the legislative agenda for the 2018 legislative session. While there is a committee to work on legislative issues, it is imperative that all members of the chiefs association communicate with their local legislators to advance our legislative agenda. The state legislators like to hear from and trust their local fire officials more than any of us can accomplish by meeting with your legislators at the capitol. If the legislators understand how this affects your department and their constituents, they will likely take more of an interest in our legislative issues.

I would ask that all of you get involved in the legislative initiatives of the fire service! Please contact our lobbyist Sherry Munyon at smunyon@capitolaccess.com, myself at bj.jungmann@burnsvillemn.gov 952-895-4571 or any legislative committee member if you have any questions or need any assistance. Please also contact Sherry or me if you have any ideas for legislative issues that would be appropriate for the chiefs association to potentially adopt. We are also looking to get committee members from each region, please consider joining the committee if your region is not represented.

Legislative Committee Members

Allen Lewis, Fire Chief, Virginia Fire
 BJ Jungmann, Fire Chief, Burnsville Fire
 Dan L'Allier, Deputy Public Safety Director, Lino Lakes Public Safety Department
 Dale Specken, Fire Chief, Hopkins Fire
 Erik Jankila, Fire Chief, Hibbing Fire
 George Esbensen, Fire Chief, Eden Prairie Fire
 John Fruetel, Fire Chief, Minneapolis Fire
 John Piper, Fire Chief, Coon Rapids Fire
 Ken Prillaman, Fire Chief, Brooklyn Park Fire
 Kevin Schroeder, Fire Chief, Cloquet Area Fire District
 Mark Klaith, Fire Chief, Marshall Fire
 Mike Pott, Fire Chief, South Metro Fire
 Mike Scott, Fire Chief, Eagan Fire
 Nyle Zickmund, Executive Director, MSFCA
 Rich Duysen, Fire Chief, Moorehead Fire
 Sherry Munyon, Lobbyist, Capitol Access
 Tim Butler, Fire Chief, St. Paul Fire
 Tom Miller, Fire Chief, Pine City Fire
 John Vance, Fire Chief, Minnetonka Fire
 Wayne Kewitsch, Fire Chief, Richfield Fire