

## 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 2018 legislative session was the second year of the biennium, which means that all of the bills not passed in the first year carried over and were able to be heard/passed in the second year. This also means that it was not a budget year, which usually means legislators focus more time on policy issues and capital investments/bonding, and not finance. At the end of the session, there was still a lot of time spent on finance this past session. A supplemental budget that was 998 pages long passed the house and senate but ended up vetoed by the Governor.

A huge win this year was the passage of the post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) presumption. This effort was led by the MPFF and supported by MSFCA, MSFDA and MN-FAC (Minnesota Fire Association Coalition). This is one component of the MNFIRE initiative. By implementing the PTSD presumption, it shifts the burden from the employee to the employer. If you are diagnosed with PTSD as a firefighter it is now presumed that the illness was contracted as part of your work as a firefighter. The employer will now have to prove that the illness was not contracted as part of your course of employment. I hope that this will help firefighters and other public safety professionals get treatment for their mental health illnesses without having to worry about who is going to pay for it. This is a major policy change and there were very compelling speeches given on the house floor about this topic leading to unanimous vote to approve the

bill. Those compelling speeches were given by State Representatives Zerwas, Mahoney and Johnson. Thank you to all of our fire service partners who helped work on this bill.

One big initiative that we will need your assistance to pass is the creation of Fire Protection District Authority. Unfortunately, the House Property Tax committee would not hear this bill. However, the Senate did hear this bill and included our proposal in the Senate Tax bill. Due to opposition from the House this bill was removed during conference committee negotiations between the house and senate. The framework proposed to allow Fire Protection Districts is important to the future of the Minnesota Fire Service giving departments another option for collaboration, equity between communities, staffing, equipment, transparency in budgeting and sustainable funding through collaboration. 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. Forty-two states already have enabling legislation and operate departments very successful 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 House Property Tax Committee has major reservation about allowing another special taxing district.

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Without our proposed framework, It is likely that each of individual 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. In addition, there have been concerns from some local governments about the current process of contracting for service and the sustainability of the current options for providing sustainable fire protection services. Given the makeup of Minnesota's Fire Service, I think the Fire Protection Districts will be key to providing a sustainable path forward for many departments in the state. Cloquet Fire District is currently set up as a fire protection district through special legislation. Chief Schroeder has been working for many years to get their legislation amended to fix a technical reference in their legislation which has been preventing them having bonding authority.

We will be discussing this issue more at the Chiefs Conference in St. Paul this year; attend the roundtable discussion to learn more about the benefits of Fire Protection Districts. Please contact me if you would like more information or are interested in assisting with this initiative.

Another big success this year is the adoption of the omnibus pension bill. It has been a few years since a pension bill has been adopted leaving many provisions recommended by the Auditors Relief Association Working Group. This year's bill includes requirements for the fire chief to certify service credit, clarification on concurrent service credit, enables EMS personnel to earn relief association benefits from a fire based EMS service, establishes combined service credit option, establishing a trust if a relief association dissolves and establishes/adjusts maximum benefit caps on some plans.

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. Surprisingly neither of the topics made it to the Governor's desk.

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 other associations

to reach resolution on bills that we had concerns over.

As you are reading this, the committee has already started to work on the legislative agenda for the 2019 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. We can provide you with talking points and our lobbyist may be available to join you.

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](mailto:smunyon@capitolaccess.com), myself at [legislative@msfca.org](mailto:legislative@msfca.org) 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

Chair, FSA, Taxing Districts: BJ, Jungmann, Fire Chief, Burnsville

John Cunningham, Fire Chief, Brooklyn Park

Rich Duysen, Fire Chief, Moorehead

PTSD, MNFIRE, Cancer, Flame Retardant, Residential Sprinkler: George

Esbensen, Fire Chief, Eden Prairie

Rail Safety: John Fruetel, Fire Chief, Minneapolis

Jared Gapinski, Captain, Sauk Rapids

Erik Jankila, Fire Chief, Hibbing

Wayne Kewitsch, Fire Chief, Richfield

Mark Klaith, Fire Chief, Marshal

Ryan Kunst, Deputy State Fire Marshal, State Fire Marshal Division

Steve Koering, Fire Chief, St. Louis Park

Dan L'Allier, Fire Chief, Lino Lakes

Taxing Districts: Allen Lewis, Fire Chief, Virginia

Mark Marcy, 2nd Assistant Chief, Windom

2%: Jim McCoy, Fire Chief, Austin

Tom Miller, Fire Chief, Pine City

Rail Safety: John Piper, Fire Chief, Coon Rapids

Taxing Districts: Mike Pott, Fire Chief, South Metro

Taxing Districts: Kevin Schroeder, Fire Chief, Cloquet

Taxing Districts, Fireworks: Mike Scott, Fire Chief, Eagan

Charlie Smith, Fire Chief, SBM

Fire Code Transfer: Dale Specken, Fire Chief, Hopkins

2%: John Vance, Fire Chief, Minnetonka

Lobbyist: Sherry Munyon, Capital Access