

Minnesota Fire Association Coalition – MNFAC



2019 Post-Session Legislative Update

Minnesota Fire Association Coalition (MNFAC) had a great 2019 legislative session. The majority of our legislative priorities were advanced at the Minnesota State Capitol and all threats were stopped. We have been honored to work with you this year and look forward to all the work ahead.

The 2019 Minnesota Legislative Session got underway in early January. After a long session working diligently on our priorities, House Speaker Melissa Hortman, Senate Majority Leader Gazelka and Governor Tim Walz reached an overall budget agreement in the final days of the regular legislative session. Because their overall agreement was not reached until the final hours of the regular session, a special session was called by Governor Walz to complete and pass all the budget bills. The 2019 Special Session adjourned on May 25, 2019.

At the Minnesota State Capitol, we met with numerous committee Chairs, dozens of legislators, agency heads, the Governor's office and House and Senate leaders. We told our stories over and over, made sure legislators knew what we supported and what we opposed, and developed strong relationships across the political spectrum and with key players in all caucuses and the Governor's team.

We also had a successful Day at the Capitol. Fire chiefs, firefighters, fire marshals and arson investigators meet with legislators and Department of Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington.

Additionally, we tracked and monitored 92 separate pieces of legislation that impacted the MNFAC.

Fire Safety Account

We succeeded in securing all funding dollars in the Fire Safety Account. We worked closely with the House and Senate Chairs of the Public Safety Committee and with Department of Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington to protect our resources from being used for other purposes. The Fire Safety Account funds the State Fire Marshal's office, the Minnesota Board of Firefighter Training and Education (MBFTE) and the Statewide Response Teams including Hazardous Materials Teams, Task Force 1 Structural Collapse Team and the Air Rescue Team.

Local Control of Emergency Medical Services

Importantly, we have begun what likely will be a multi-year effort to educate the Minnesota Legislature on the need for local control of emergency medical services. We are looking forward to educating legislators on current practices that allow ambulance providers the ability to provide EMS services in exclusive operating areas. We will be working toward allowing those decisions to be made at the local level by those in the best position to choose the best level of service and best provider for local citizens.

Residential Fire Sprinklers

Working together we stopped efforts to ban residential fire sprinklers. The Senate Omnibus State Government Finance bill contained a provision that prohibited any building code requirement that added \$1,000.00 to the cost of residential housing. We strongly opposed this back-door attempt to ban residential sprinklers. We worked closely with the House State Government Finance Chair and were successful in getting this provision removed from the final bill.

Fireworks Expansion

Legislation was introduced to expand fireworks in both the House and Senate. We employed numerous strategies to ensure that these bills did not advance. This included working with a coalition of groups that oppose the expansion of fireworks in Minnesota. While we succeeded this year, this remains a perennial issue.

Fire Protection Districts

Thank you to everyone who worked on the Fire Protection Special Taxing District effort. Thank you especially to the chiefs and firefighters who testified and attended the hearings on this important legislation. Unfortunately, the House Tax Committee has not been persuaded to support this legislation. These legislators continue to object based on their belief that property taxes will grow across the state. The Senate Tax Committee did support our legislation with a levy limit cap, but the House would not accept their proposal in the Tax Conference Committee.

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2019 Post-Session Legislative Update, *Continued*

Pension Changes

We were also very busy working with legislators on the Pension Commission. Thank you to all of you who serve on the various state mandated Fire Service Pension Working Groups. Many of the State Auditor's Volunteer Fire Relief Association Working Group recommendations were enacted into law. Additionally, the pension buy back for military leave was enacted into law. Next year we anticipate significant activity related to the work product of the Fire State Aid Working Group, the Conversions and Dissolutions Working Group, State Auditor's Volunteer Fire Relief Association Working Group and the PERA Statewide Volunteer Firefighter Plan Advisory Board.

Flame Retardant Ban

We worked to successfully pass a ban on flame retardant chemicals, with some limited exceptions. This legislation will help reduce firefighter exposure to toxic chemicals.

MNFIRE

We worked in partnership with the MNFIRE Initiative to advance their efforts at the State Capitol. While this important legislation has not yet become law, the issue received a lot of attention and legislators are beginning to understand the need. MNFIRE Initiative had a press conference to highlight the issue with the House and Senate authors. Thank you to everyone who came and participated. We look forward to continuing to push this legislation.

MBFTE Statute Changes

The Minnesota Board of Firefighter Training and Education (MBFTE) updated numerous parts of the MBFTE statutes this year. We worked together to support their effort and ensure that adverse language was not added to any statute updates. We appreciated working with MBFTE and are pleased with the outcome for firefighter training and education.

School Evacuation Requirements

We successfully stopped an alternative school fire drill proposal that was advanced by the Minnesota Senate in the Senate Omnibus Education bill. We succeeded in keeping it out of the House Omnibus Education bill and we met with the author of the provision to share our opposition. We worked with the chairs of the House Education Finance Committee and the House Education Policy Committee to keep the alternative fire drill measure from being included in the final Omnibus Education Bill.

2019 Legislative Session Conclusion

MNFAC's 2019 legislative efforts were quite successful. We employed numerous strategies depending on which part of the MNFAC agenda we were working on and involved the MNFAC members in meetings, testimony and planning. We had a successful Day at the Capitol.

Working together, our legislative efforts were quite successful. We stopped our threats, passed or advanced on all our priorities but one. We have made significant headway on advancing our relationships with new legislative chairs, new legislators, new majorities and the Governor's office.

Together we grew our footprint at the Minnesota Capitol and our presence was felt as policy was debated that impacted all the members of MNFAC. It has been an honor to work with you. Please don't hesitate to contact us.