



CT FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

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February 14, 2020

Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

RE: Testimony Regarding Regional Fire School Operational Funding and Sustainment

We are responding to the Proposed Bill No. 122 introduced by Sen Sampson of the 16th District.

As stated in a letter from the Connecticut State Firefighters Association, Inc., there are nine (9) regional fire training schools in the State of Connecticut in addition to the Connecticut Fire Academy located in Windsor Locks. The regional fire training schools are located strategically to support and compliment the training and education of career and volunteer firefighters across the state by providing access to proper facilities and instructional staff. Thousands of students pass through the doors of Connecticut's regional fire training schools in order to learn basic firefighting skills, strategy and tactics in modern construction, vehicle rescue techniques in newer electric and hybrid vehicles and even how to save lives and rescue civilians during active shooter type events. The most important aspect of a regional fire training school that sets it apart from any other educational facility are the specially constructed and maintained live fire training simulators and buildings where fires are set and controlled in a training environment.

Operational funding is currently inadequate for sustainment of operations at the regional fire training schools and requires a long-term solution. Currently, the fire training schools are only funded at 2012 levels that do not take into account the rising costs of utilities, insurance, maintenance and repairs. Local municipalities have been impacted by this through increased usage fees charged for training and has resulted in some volunteers firefighters being turned away based on the department's inability to pay for basic training. The regional fire training schools need a 5-year plan to increase operational funding. The Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association is currently working with the CSFA, bipartisan representatives from the Fire/EMS caucus, and fire service stakeholders to identify proper funding levels for the schools going forward that will ensure safe facilities remain available and operational for all of Connecticut's firefighters and emergency responders to attend.

The operation of the regional fire training schools comes at a minimal price and remains extremely cost effective for the services provided benefitting all communities. While each regional fire training school is organized and operated somewhat differently based on the host organization and physical property owner, the basic costs are founded on similar drivers. The funds for operations and maintenance of the schools generally come from the state funding to each of the nine schools. Instructional programming costs are mostly covered by fees charged to the users for classes, instructors, consumables, special supplies, testing fees and equipment.

Additionally, fire training buildings and simulators have a planned and predictable life span with normal use due to the natural damaging effect of fire on building materials. Additional testing, inspection and repair of sacrificial walls are required every five years to avoid damage to structural components that continues to occur due to deferred maintenance and over use of existing operating buildings as all nine schools are not currently operational.

On behalf of the CT Fire Chiefs Association, I respectfully request that the committee take a very good look at each of the regional school's requests for their Operation's Budgets for the next fiscal year and put together a plan that supports these budgets without a sunset clause for sustainability.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce A. Dixon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bruce" being the most prominent.

Bruce A. Dixon
President, CT Fire Chiefs Association

