



CONNECTICUT STATE FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

February 18, 2021

Senators Cathy Osten, Joan Hartley, Miner
Representatives Toni Walker, Lucy Dathan, Mike France

Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

CSFA represents approximately 26,000 career and volunteer F/F. As you and your committee's members are aware, one of our Association's important responsibilities, one which we take very seriously, is the operation of the 9 Regional Fire Training Schools. **Their budgets are separate line items within the DESPP budget.**

Connecticut's firefighters need your assistance. In the past 10+ years, Connecticut's Regional Fire Training Schools have continually struggled to be funded. The Fire Training Schools operating budgets are now being funded at a level that is lower than they were 10 years ago. Within those 10 years we have lived through reductions, rescissions, even a flat-out zeroed budget by one Administration. If not for the continued support of the Appropriations Committee restoring some level of our funding annually, we would not have been able to provide the training that Connecticut's firefighters are **REQUIRED** to undertake because of either State or Federal mandates. The Regional Fire Training Schools, in cooperation with the Connecticut Fire Academy, support the education and training of firefighters and fire officers from Connecticut's 169 municipalities, 369 fire departments, 2 tribal nations, and many private fire brigades including the military. The facilities are also used by some State agencies as well as some local agencies.

We would request that you carefully look at the information provided below and approve a 10% across the board increase for the budgets of all of Connecticut's Regional Fire Training School operational funding. Please note, this request will support Connecticut's Fire Service, but the real beneficiaries are the citizens of the State of Connecticut. We would suggest that our request is a NEED rather than a want.

NEW FACILITIES

We have been fortunate in that the State has upgraded two of the schools and performed complete rebuilds of three others. This has allowed us to perform our services in more up to date facilities. However, with these up-to-date facilities comes up-to-date learning technology (computerized audio-visual equipment, computer-controlled HVAC systems, etc.) Because of these computer-controlled learning devices comes climate-controlled systems that must operate continually day & night. As you can imagine, this leads to increased cost for electricity, and these systems require more scheduled maintenance

COVID 19 IMPACTS:

As the fire service looks forward into the next fiscal year, the current pandemic continues to sweep across our nation and continues to be a major concern for Connecticut's Fire Training Schools and the Fire Service. Looking forward we see CT's first responders within the fire service continue taking on an additional burden of new ways to do our jobs. It had been stated by authorities that the **COVID 19** pandemic will not subside until a vaccine is developed. Now that a vaccine has been developed, new strains of the virus continue to hamper our services. It appears that the restrictions placed on all organizations because of the pandemic may continue to place a financial burden on our training practices.

- **Social Distancing:** Basic Firefighter I & II training includes approximately 170 – 184 hours of classroom instruction and practical skills (hands on) training. With the requirement of social distancing, the size of our

- classes that amounted to 15 - 40 students, depending on class subject, now requires doubling (at least) the number of classrooms to accommodate one class. Likewise, during the practical skills training, because of the limited number of students that can gather in one space outside, additional space or time is needed accordingly. Each skill sets cause for additional expenses needed to operate these schools. (Additional certified instructors and test proctors to oversee proper instruction and operational skills)
- **Sanitizing:** The classroom facility which includes tables and chairs, training props, AV equipment, lunch-rooms, and like items need to be constantly sanitized. To maintain these sanitizing requirements, significant quantities of cleaning supplies and equipment are needed. Also, the common areas of the facility will need the same attention. (Additional staff to sanitize the equipment and the facility)
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Firefighters are not new to PPE. On the fireground (on the job) they each have their own assigned coat, pants, helmet, air-pack equipment, etc. They are less familiar with the continual use of the additional PPE that is needed at the Fire Training Schools. They would not have their own assigned face masks, face shields, medical gowns, etc. Most of these are one-time consumables. We believe that current restrictions would require the use of these consumables both inside and outside while in the training environment.

On average, the Regional Fire Training Schools serve several thousand students annually. Training courses range from BASIC Firefighter I & II (usually a combined course which includes Basic First Aid and Basic HAZ-MAT awareness), through the more advanced courses such as Firefighter III & IV, Fire Instructor I & II, Fire Officer I thru III, and Flashover simulator. Additional hours of training include fitness, and mental health, PTSD, and cancer awareness. The Fire Service has realized that having a healthy and aware firefighter translates to less on-the-job injuries or illnesses. The **COVID 19** crisis has allowed many agencies to realize that remote learning could become the “new normal”. This may lead many to believe that there will be fiscal savings using this technology. However, we have discussed that with this technology comes the need for additional technological infrastructure to allow this to happen. We cannot state whether remote learning will provide any savings for us. **In addition, OSHA regulations require that interior certified firefighters must perform a “live burn” session annually.**

We understand that our current financial concerns are because of the same pandemic that is causing Connecticut’s current financial concerns. We also realize that many agencies are in the same condition that we are. The one difference is that many of these other agencies can scale back their operations to attempt to compensate. **WE CANNOT MAKE THAT DECISION.** The fire service needs to be prepared to respond to **COVID 19** and any other emergencies. We have been for the past year while most everyone else was quarantined. That is because of the training we have been providing. The fires and emergencies did not stop. In fact, they increased. When our first responders are called, they must respond to the public’s call. And the citizens of Connecticut expect trained and effective actions from the persons that respond to their call for help.

It has been noted that the State expects to end the current fiscal year with a surplus. After 10 years of decreasing, the Regional Fire Training Schools budgets could use a well-deserved increase this year.

Respectfully,

William Halstead

William Halstead, President
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