

## Working Group to Develop Solutions to Meet the Needs for Municipal Volunteer Personnel

Resolve 2015, chapter 49, Meeting #2, November 3, 2015

### Meeting Notes

Attending: Senator Linda Baker, Representative Michel Lajoie, Representative Timothy Theriault, William Gillespie and Jeffrey Cammack. Absent: Anthony Russo. Michael Barker resigned prior to the meeting. Staff present: Deirdre Schneider and Jane Orbeton, Office of Policy and Legal Analysis.

The second meeting of the Working Group to Develop Solutions to Meet the Needs for Municipal Volunteer Personnel was held on November 3rd in Augusta. The meeting included the following speakers and discussions:

- **Chief Robert Posick, Calais Fire Department**, spoke of the Calais Fire Department which provides fire and emergency medical services and is staffed by full-time, part-time and call-in personnel. Chief Posick spoke of the connections between recruitment, training and retention and of the positive value of specialty training and Length of Service programs. (Berwick and South Portland have operating Length of Service programs.) He asked for regional training, offering accredited classes by experienced trainers. He spoke in favor of training, even at municipal expense and even if newly trained personnel move to another community, done regionally and possibly with a centralized academy. He spoke of the positive relationship between his department and Washington County Community College and the St Croix Regional Technical Center. He spoke of the positive impact of active community involvement, close work with high schools and the vocational technical school. Chief Posick stressed the importance of very good training, with good food, the value of retirement benefits and Length of Service programs and the benefits of treating personnel as family. Chief Posick mentioned the good relationships Calais has with municipalities in their mutual aid agreement and of the automatic response agreement and coordinated training with St Stephen, New Brunswick.
- **Firefighter Robert Cousins of the Calais Fire Department**, spoke of his experience signing up and getting trained, of his continuing outreach to students and younger residents of Washington County, and of the benefits to the whole state of trained personnel even if they move from the community in which they were trained to a new community. Firefighter Cousins mentioned that specialty courses attract firefighters and help to maintain a level of interest.
- **Chief Nate Schools, Buxton Fire Department**, discussed his interest in paramedic/firefighting from his high school days, his training and experience as a live-in firefighter in Gorham, his work with the live-in program at the present and the importance of grant funding for the program. He discussed outreach, open houses, the Safer program (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response), scholarships and the possibility of student loan forgiveness, and the importance of training being held locally and being affordable.

The chairs, Senator Baker and Representative Lajoie, welcomed members of the public who attended the meeting and invited their participation. These attendees included Shaun St. Germain, Director, Maine Emergency Medical Services, Pamela Megathlin and Michael LaPlante, Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Standards, Garret Corbin, Maine Municipal Association, Walter Morse, Chief, Jefferson Fire Department, Fred Bowers, Town of Alna Fire Department Recruitment Committee, Jeff Maker, retired call firefighter, Calais Fire Department and Jim Grenier, Somerville Volunteer Fire Department.

Working group members discussed the following issues:

1. The possibility of training costs that were paid for a firefighter/EMT by one municipality then being repaid to that original municipality by a municipality that later hires the trained person.
2. The importance of strong leadership in recruitment, training and retention and the possibility of required training or certification for officers and chiefs.
3. The possibility of alcohol and/or tobacco tax increases to pay for initiatives supported by the working group.
4. The importance of strong community relationships and local public relations initiatives to recruitment, retention and adequate funding.
5. Changing Maine EMS licensure requirements to enable veterans with combat medic experience to qualify for licensure.
6. The proposal under consideration in Maine EMS to require emergency medical service vehicles that are transporting a patient from one hospital to another hospital to utilize a driver who is qualified as an EMT.

**Information distributed at the meeting:** Deirdre and Jane discussed with the working group information on municipal volunteer recruitment, training and retention initiatives from other states and from Congress and data from Maine Municipal Association and the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission. Members of the working group discussed the suggestions for working group priorities submitted to Deirdre and Jane. Pamela Megathlin, DOL, provided a handout entitled *Fact or Fiction for Fire Departments*, a copy of which will be posted online with working group materials. Walter Morse, Chief of the Jefferson Fire Department, provided a handout entitled *Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Ideas You Can Use*, a copy of which will be posted online with working group materials. This article addresses public relations and marketing, recruitment strategies, promotion of volunteerism, partnerships with local businesses, community involvement, youth programs, media relations, leadership and benefits for volunteer personnel and improving Insurance Service Office grading levels in order to lower fire insurance rates.

**Information requests:** Members of the working group requested that Deirdre and Jane obtain the following information for the meeting on November 17: (1) information on options for continuing the working group, (2) information on tobacco tax and alcohol tax increases to be used as funding sources for working group initiatives.

**Future meeting:** The final meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, November 17 at 9:30am in Room 209 of the Cross Office Building in Augusta.