



Legislative
Services Agency

MINUTES

Emergency Services Interim Study Committee

October 4, 2006

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Tom Hancock, Co-chairperson
Senator Pat Ward, Co-chairperson
Senator Jeff Danielson
Senator Dave Mulder

Representative Linda Upmeyer,
Co-chairperson
Representative Geri Huser
Representative Roger Thomas
Representative Dave Tjepkes
Representative Philip L. Wise

MEETING IN BRIEF

Organizational staffing provided
by: Emily Gardyas, Legal
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Minutes prepared by: Tim
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- I. **Procedural Business.**
- II. **Iowa Firemen's Association.**
- III. **Iowa Emergency Medical Services Association.**
- IV. **Emergency Room Physician.**
- V. **Iowa Fire Chiefs' Association.**
- VI. **Iowa Association of Professional Fire Chiefs.**
- VII. **State Fire Service and Emergency Response Council.**
- VIII. **Emergency Services Structure and Funding.**
- IX. **Northeast Iowa Community College.**
- X. **Materials Distributed and on File With the Legislative Services Agency — Legal Services Division.**



Emergency Services Interim Study Committee

I. Procedural Business.

Call to Order. Temporary Co-chairperson Senator Hancock called the meeting of the Emergency Services Interim Study Committee to order at 12:35 p.m., Wednesday, October 4, 2006, in Room 24 of the State Capitol Building. The Committee moved the meeting to the Supreme Court Consultation Room at 12:55 p.m.

Election of Permanent Co-chairpersons. Members of the Emergency Services Interim Study Committee elected temporary Co-chairpersons Senator Hancock, Senator Ward, and Representative Upmeyer as permanent Co-chairpersons.

Adoption of Rules. Members of the Emergency Services Interim Study Committee adopted procedural rules which are available, upon request, from the Legislative Services Agency.

Next Meeting. The Committee agreed to tentatively schedule the Committee's second meeting for November 13, 2006, at 9:00 a.m.

Adjournment. The Committee adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

II. Iowa Firemen's Association.

Mr. Joe Specht, Iowa Firemen's Association, stated that recruitment and retention of volunteers are significant issues, the number of volunteers participating in fire protection is decreasing, and the taxation system in place to pay for fire protection does not work well in all areas of the state.

Mr. Mike McKinnon, Iowa Firemen's Association, spoke regarding the past, present, and future of fire service in Iowa.

Mr. McKinnon stated that historically fire departments and protection areas were formed on an ad hoc basis, funding of fire departments has always been an issue, fire department costs continue to increase, and benefited fire districts were eliminated in the 1970s.

Mr. McKinnon stated Iowa has over 800 volunteer fire departments and approximately 20,000 volunteer firefighters. He stated that the average age of volunteers is rising and the average length of service is declining. Mr. McKinnon stated that volunteers spend too much time on nonfirefighting duties such as fundraisers and community functions.

Mr. McKinnon stated that property tax rollbacks are significantly reducing the funding available to fire departments and that bidding wars are occurring between townships for fire protection. He stated that there are over 3,000 taxing bodies for fire and emergency services and that the antiquated township taxing system is inadequate to meet the current funding needs of fire departments.

Mr. McKinnon suggested that the future for fire departments is bleak. He forecasted that paperwork requirements will continue; the need for recruitment, training, and retention will continue; the number of volunteers will continue to decline; the amount of available tax dollars will continue to decline; and costs will continue to increase.

Mr. McKinnon suggested that fire response boundaries will need to be restructured and service sharing will become essential. Mr. McKinnon suggested that the allowance of benefited fire districts should be reimplemented; that a three-year pilot project for service sharing should be



implemented; that state-sponsored training to fire departments through direct delivery, regionally and centrally, should continue; that the State Fire Marshal's Special Agent Program should be fully funded; and that informational meetings to receive feedback from the fire and emergency services sectors should continue to be held.

In response to questions by the Committee, Mr. McKinnon stated that some service sharing is currently occurring, but that more needs to occur. Mr. McKinnon stated that there is a need for the law to better identify which type of public safety personnel is specifically in charge at an emergency scene.

III. Iowa Emergency Medical Services Association.

Mr. Ric Jones, Iowa Emergency Medical Services Association, identified obstacles to providing emergency medical services (EMS) as a lack of funding, recruitment and retention concerns, antiquated EMS response districts, a lack of clear identity, a lack of physician engagement, a lack of access to training, and a failure to mandate service.

Mr. Jones stated that EMS is in need of a dedicated funding stream to fund the EMS Bureau of the Department of Public Health (DPH), including regional support staff, restoration of a state medical director, restoration of the coordinator position for the automatic external defibrillator program, increased grants for training, restoration of grants for EMS equipment, and restoration of funding for regional EMS councils. Mr. Jones stated that the reimbursement system, including Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, and patient responsibility, does not work well and, as a result, fees for EMS do not cover the cost of service. Mr. Jones stated that significant EMS costs are incurred by simply being ready to make an EMS call.

Mr. Jones stated that 80 percent of Iowa's population is served by full-time, paid EMS personnel and that the remaining 20 percent are served by EMS volunteers. Mr. Jones stated that EMS volunteers are difficult to recruit, train, and retain. Mr. Jones suggested that the state can assist the volunteer EMS workforce by providing an income tax credit to volunteers, relieve the volunteers of the expenses associated with volunteering, and provide some form of state-funded pension system benefits.

Mr. Jones stated that EMS response districts are antiquated and follow boundaries which do not always facilitate the closest capable unit responding to an EMS call. He stated that the district boundaries need to be redrawn to allow for a more efficient distribution of service.

Mr. Jones stated that EMS suffers from a lack of clear identity due to the fact that EMS has only been in existence in Iowa since the 1960s and that EMS may or may not be affiliated with a fire department. He stated that EMS is provided in Iowa by fire departments, hospitals, private operators, cities, counties, law enforcement agencies, and funeral homes. Mr. Jones stated that public EMS employees under the Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System should be included in the protection class created for public safety employees.

Mr. Jones stated that it is very difficult to get a physician to assume the duties and risks of being a medical director, and that truly engaged physician medical directors are rare.

Mr. Jones stated that while the community college system does an admirable job of EMS training, recent community college funding cuts have led to increased costs in training EMS personnel.



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Mr. Jones stated that while cities and counties are required to provide fire protection and law enforcement, those entities are not required to provide EMS. Furthermore, DPH is merely required to regulate and oversee EMS.

IV. Emergency Room Physician.

Dr. Mark Singsank, M.D., an emergency room physician from Dubuque, spoke regarding the need for more emergency physicians in the state. Dr. Singsank stated that the University of Iowa has begun a residency program for emergency physicians, which will help to increase the number of such physicians in the state. He stated that the number needs to increase because the state does not have the surge capacity needed at times of major statewide medical emergencies.

Dr. Singsank stated that Iowa is in need of a state medical director for EMS. He stated that 36 states have state medical directors for EMS.

Dr. Singsank stated that recruiting volunteer EMS personnel is difficult, diseases are a barrier to recruitment, hospitals should increase support for EMS, and physician oversight for EMS is inadequate.

Dr. Singsank stated that there is a lack of modernized protocols for EMS, that there is a lack of a statewide agenda for EMS, and that there is insufficient oversight and coordination of helicopter EMS.

Dr. Singsank recommended that the state hire a state medical director for EMS, that a statewide EMS advisory commission with representation by emergency physicians be instituted, that barriers to the recruitment of volunteer EMS personnel should be addressed, that there should be a modernization of training for EMS personnel, and that the medical safety net of the state should be supported.

V. Iowa Fire Chiefs' Association.

Mr. Rick Claassen and Ms. Ellen Hagen, Iowa Fire Chiefs' Association, stated that the Special Agents Program of the State Fire Marshal's Office is inadequately staffed due to overtime limits. They stated that the Fire Service Training Bureau (FSTB) is a good source for training, but that funding needs to be increased. They stated that recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters is a significant issue, and that retirement plan incentives or tax credits are needed to encourage volunteering. They stated that a statewide minimum tax levy rate is necessary for equity purposes in order to ensure that cities contribute equitably for fire service. They stated that some local governments use local option sales tax revenues to fund fire service instead of raising the levy rate of the community. They stated that there is currently no training program for fire chiefs, and that a regional approach to fire service would be attractive except that local protectionism would be an obstacle.

VI. Iowa Association of Professional Fire Chiefs.

Mr. Bob Platts, Iowa Association of Professional Fire Chiefs, stated that funding for regional training facilities should be sustained and that grant funding should be added. Mr. Platts stated that a central training facility should be established. Mr. Platts stated that funding cuts and property tax rollbacks have hurt fire service in the state. Mr. Platts suggested that the volunteer



training fund should be changed to also encompass paid fire departments. Mr. Platts suggested that the Special Agents Program of the State Fire Marshal's Office should be fully funded and staffed so that overtime limits are not a problem, and FSTB should be fully funded and staffed.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr. Platts stated that a regional approach to fire service should be encouraged, but not mandated, by the state.

VII. State Fire Service and Emergency Response Council.

Mr. Clint Petersen, State Fire Service and Emergency Response Council, provided information regarding the composition and history of the Council. The Council consists of 11 voting members and was established in 2001. Mr. Petersen stated that the Council is a representative body that acts through the consensus of the membership of the Council. Mr. Petersen stated that the Council needs guidance from the General Assembly regarding the duties and mission of the Council.

Mr. Petersen discussed the Council's plan for training, which includes regional training centers, mobile training apparatus, and a state facility. Mr. Petersen stated the regional training centers are designed to provide training close to departments, basic and intermediate level training, high demand training, and small-to-medium-size group training. The mobile training apparatus is designed to provide introductory or basic training in required skills directly on location to a fire department, provide hands-on training, and introduce hazardous environment training in a controlled situation. The comprehensive state facility plan is designed to provide training using resources not economically viable to replicate in all regions, provide advanced level training, and provide low demand yet necessary training in specialty areas.

Mr. Petersen reviewed the services provided by FSTB, the role of the community colleges in training, the role of the National Fire Academy, and the role of regional training centers.

Mr. Petersen suggested that changes should be made in the collection of training revenue, that the General Assembly should clarify the role the Council is to provide, that cost estimates should be obtained for capital expenditures related to the construction of regional training centers, that momentum should continue for funding regional training centers, that the construction of a state training facility should be funded, that the acquisition of mobile training apparatus should be funded, and that FSTB should be fully funded.

VIII. Emergency Services Structure and Funding.

Mr. George Oster, former director, Fire Service Extension, Iowa State University, stated that Iowa's emergency response delivery system and the system for financing emergency response are severely impaired, irrational, and antiquated. He stated that the emergency response system is utterly gerrymandered, driven by money, provides little incentive to develop rational response plans or share services, and is severely underfunded.

Mr. Oster stated that there are 872 independent fire departments and that 80 percent of the departments serve population bases of fewer than 5,000 and over half of the 872 serve population bases of fewer than 2,000. He stated that almost the entire cost of emergency services is borne by the two smallest units of government — cities and counties.



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Mr. Oster stated that while joint services are allowed through agreements under Code chapter 28E, taxing and bonding authority remains with the cities and townships.

Mr. Oster stated that the emergency response system in Iowa is overwhelmingly a volunteer force, and replacing the volunteer system would cost many millions of dollars.

Mr. Oster recommended that benefited fire districts be reenacted in an effort to centralize the emergency response system. He stated that a model used in Missouri seemed to work well. Mr. Oster also recommended that the Emergency Response Information System should be completed and that a statewide educational effort be funded and coordinated by FSTB to help educate communities and their emergency services concerning the benefits and means of reorganizing.

In response to questions by the Committee, Mr. Oster stated that money is the primary issue preventing regionalism from occurring. He stated that the general public is not aware of the impending crisis in emergency services.

IX. Northeast Iowa Community College.

Mr. Dan Neenan, Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC), described the process in planning, funding, and building the Dubuque County Fire Association Regional Emergency Responder Training Facility.

Mr. Neenan stated that the project was initiated in 1999 and received both public and private financing. The facility opened in August 2006. The facility provides safe training for emergency responders, training space for both the public sector and private industry, and interoperable training. He stated that training moneys stay in Dubuque County and are also brought in from outside of Dubuque County. NICC has signed a management agreement with the Dubuque County Fire Association to manage the facility.

Mr. Neenan described the training that can take place at the new facility through NICC. Training includes primary education to firefighters; firefighter certification; EMS, EMT, paramedic, and first responder education; public safety dispatcher training; and other related training, including agricultural safety. The facility also allows EMS, fire, law enforcement, and public safety dispatchers to conduct interoperable training exercises.

X. Materials Distributed and on File With the Legislative Services Agency — Legal Services Division.

The materials listed were distributed at or in connection with the meeting and are on file with the Legislative Services Agency. The materials may be accessed from the "Additional Information" link on the Committee's Internet page:

<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/aspx/Committees/Committee.aspx?id=152>

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1. Background materials submitted by Ms. Emily Gardyas, Legal Services Division, Legislative Services Agency.
2. "Iowa Firemen's Association: The Voice of Iowa's Fire Fighters," Iowa Firemen's Association testimonials, and PowerPoint handout submitted by Mr. Joe Specht and Mr. Mike McKinnon, Iowa Firemen's Association.
3. PowerPoint handout submitted by Mr. Ric Jones, Iowa Emergency Medical Services Association.
4. PowerPoint handout submitted by Dr. Mark Singsank, M.D.
5. "2005-2006 Fire Service Training Bureau Statistics," submitted by Mr. Rick Claassen and Ms. Ellen Hagen, Iowa Fire Chiefs' Association.
6. PowerPoint handout submitted by Mr. Bob Platts, Iowa Association of Professional Fire Chiefs.
7. PowerPoint handout submitted by Mr. Clint Petersen, State Fire Service and Emergency Response Council.
8. "Transforming Iowa's Emergency Response System: A First Step," submitted by Mr. George Oster, former director, Fire Service Extension, Iowa State University.
9. PowerPoint handout submitted by Mr. Dan Neenan, Northeast Iowa Community College.

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