



CITY OF MCPHERSON FIRE DEPARTMENT

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FIRE CHIEF T.J. WYSSMANN

January 31st, 2020

City of McPherson Fire Department Opposition Testimony for Senate Bill 294 for February 5th, 2020 Senator Caryn Tyson Assessment and Taxation Committee Chairman.

Thank you, Chairman for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee in opposition of Senate Bill 294 on behalf of the City of McPherson Fire Department.

We have been entrusted to provide an all hazards fire service to our community. The capabilities of our service are based on our unique infrastructure and assessment of potential risk to the citizens and community. Our citizens, businesses, and industries have expectations of a level of care and services that are committed and oriented to meet their needs. We have fulfilled this commitment since 1883, and our department's slogan of "We Will" is our promise to meet those expectations within our community.

The proposed Senate Bill 294 would remove the exemption of public safety services. Thus, restricting our ability to meet the expectations and fulfill our promises to the citizens of McPherson, Kansas. This bill, in current form, would limit the Department in adjustments to inflation of apparatus, personal protective equipment, training expenses and the ability to comply with the many unfunded State and Federal requirements for public safety services. Current inflation rates increase annually for fire services in a range from six to ten percent.

The inability to adjust locally, based on community risk assessment, would exacerbate the aging apparatus and personal protective equipment problem among Kansas Fire Services. This would lead to greater safety issues and increased risk from apparatus that are no longer capable of incident mitigation and compliance with evolving safety standards. The State of Kansas has numerous examples of recent past incidents in which aging apparatus, equipment and insufficient training, resulted in incidents growing to historic size and complexity. This contributed to some of the greatest fire losses in the history of the State of Kansas.

The City of McPherson recently conducted a comprehensive wage study through McGrath & Company, which resulted in an increase to wages of fire service personnel. This put our salaries and wages in line with other like size communities, within our State. Doing so, ensures the retention and recruitment of personnel to our municipality and the State of Kansas. Senate Bill 294 in current form, would restrict our ability to stay competitive with salaries and wages. This will only compound the current issues in the retention and recruitment of personnel to the fire service and the State of Kansas.

The City of McPherson Fire Department is conducting an ongoing evaluation of risk, utilizing the Standards of Cover assessment tool. This tool is used to identify the unique characteristics of our community. The initial results of this study have indicated the need for additional personnel to meet our standards of cover. We are enacting a local strategic plan to meet those needs. However, the current Senate Bill would crush any ability for our municipality to add or maintain additional personnel to meet those needs.

It is our hope that this committee consider the implication of enacting Senate Bill 294 in its current form, which restricts us from fulfilling our community driven obligations to public safety. We understand the crucial need to provide this service within the economic confines of our community. We ask this committee to give careful consideration to the restrictions of this bill to public safety exemptions.

Thank you Chairman Tyson and this committee for allowing my testimony.

T.J. Wyssmann
City of McPherson Fire Chief