

# Service to Others: A Report on the Commonwealth's Fire and EMS Service

---

A report to the Virginia General Assembly on Virginia's fire and EMS funding and needs as required by House Bill 2175 (2023).



# Workgroup Members





# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Office of the Governor

Terrance Cole  
Secretary of Public Safety  
and Homeland Security

November 27, 2023

The Honorable Jay Leftwich  
Chair, Committee on General Laws  
308 Cedar Lakes Drive, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Chesapeake, VA 23322

The Honorable Adam Ebbin  
Chair, Committee on General Laws and Technology  
P.O. Box 396  
Alexandria, VA 22313

Dear Delegate Leftwich / Senator Ebbin:

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the *Report on the Commonwealth's Fire and EMS Service* report as directed by HB 2175. As recent tragedies, such as the deaths of firefighters Mia Etheridge and Cameron Craig, plague the career and volunteer Fire / EMS community, the importance of appropriate training and staffing for our first responders is at the forefront of ongoing policy discussions. Fire and EMS services are critical public safety functions that localities must perform to support the well-being of their communities. As the report notes, the Code of Virginia § 27-6.1 enables the governing body of any locality to establish a fire department while §32.1-111.4:6 empowers them to establish an emergency medical service agency. Since these important functions are locally governed and due to the diverse nature of Virginia's localities, policy solutions should be largely focused at the local level.

While the state can, and continues to, actively support localities in fire and EMS efforts, the General Assembly's charge to the workgroup was to identify sustainable funding solutions and recommend the appropriate level of state involvement. While there is merit in the individual recommendations of the report, it lacks a realistic policy and funding recommendation where all stakeholders contribute to a sustainable solution with shared responsibility. Instead, the report offers a singular solution where the state would assume responsibility of funding all locality needs with a \$255 million dollar program similar to the 599 Program. We do not agree with that option as presented.

Additionally, an analysis on local funding contributions was not included in the report, as were any references to application or utilization of the robust universe of federal grants for locality fire and EMS support. Across all Virginia localities in the last five years, revenue collections have increased nearly 21%, driven mainly by increases in federal pass-throughs (+79%), but also by organic locality revenue growth (+17%) and additional state support (+10%). Localities have ultimate discretion over where to allocate resources, and the state should continue to incent local fire and EMS contributions by tying state distributions to local matches where feasible. As the population centers continue to shift within

the Commonwealth, any formula associated with state funding mechanisms shouldn't be determined by population alone. Additionally, the Department of Fire Programs should consider developing a funding mechanism that would provide additional resources to smaller localities, or those localities located in rural areas of the Commonwealth.

Notably, the report highlights most suburban and rural areas reported career EMS personnel who were "sometimes trained" to assist with fire protection. As we look to train and prepare a workforce capable of managing the array of fire and emergency needs, we agree the state must centrally define what a firefighter is and require minimum training. Currently, Virginia does not define what a firefighter is or require minimum training. Additionally, we support the recommendation to leverage the power of state purchasing by working with DGS to develop statewide contracts for new equipment. The Chief Procurement Officers for the Commonwealth will coordinate with the Department of Fire Programs to offer this cost-saving measure. The Department of Fire Programs will also begin working collaboratively with interested localities to ensure coordination with state resources.

As additional funding options are considered, the localities and Department of Fire Programs should ensure all relevant federal grants are being leveraged. To ensure coordination and knowledge of these federal resources, the Department of Fire Programs will review the possibility of creating building a publicly available platform to provide local leaders a centralized resource of these federal grants, timelines, and associated funding available. To further leverage efforts between all branches of government, the Department of Fire Programs will coordinate with the Governor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to evaluate and maximize opportunities for federal funding.

We appreciate the report as an important data point as we continue our efforts to reform these critical public safety programs. Our career and volunteer fire and EMS staff provide lifesaving services to our communities.

Sincerely,



**Terrence C. Cole**

Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security

cc: Sonny Daniels, Assistant Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**PREFACE ..... 5**

**WORKGROUP MEMBERS ..... 6**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY..... 8**

**HOUSE BILL 2175..... 9**

**WORKGROUP HISTORY ..... 9**

**VIRGINIA FIRE AND EMS NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SURVEY ..... 10**

TABLE 1: CAREER AND VOLUNTEER FIRE AND EMS PROVIDERS ..... 10

TABLE 2: ROLE OF CAREER STAFF BY NUMBER OF LOCALITIES ..... 10

TABLE 3: VOLUNTEER FIRE AND EMS PROVIDERS BY ROLE ..... 11

FIGURE 1: LOCALITIES COMPLIANCE WITH 12VAC5-31-1230..... 11

FIGURE 2: LOCALITIES ABILITY TO MEET NFPA 1710 (CAREER) OR 1720 (VOLUNTEER) ..... 12

FIGURE 3: REPORTED FUNDING GAPS IN FIRE AND EMS BY LOCALITIES ..... 12

FIGURE 4: FIRE AND EMS CALL VOLUME REPORTED BY LOCALITIES ..... 13

TABLE 4: EMS SUPPLY COST INCREASES..... 13

TABLE 5: SUPPLY COST INCREASES OF A STANDARD FIRE ENGINE ..... 14

**CURRENT STATE FUNDING ..... 14**

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS GRANTS ..... 14

TABLE 6: AID TO LOCALITY FUNDING INCREASES FY21-24 ..... 14

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES GRANTS ..... 15

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF AGENCIES IMPACTED BY RESCUE SQUAD ASSISTANCE FUNDS ..... 16

FIGURE 6: RESCUE SQUAD ASSISTANCE FUND REQUEST V. AMOUNT AWARDED..... 17

**OTHER STATES ..... 18**

FIGURE 7: STATES THAT PROVIDE EMS FUNDING TO LOCALITIES ..... 18

FIGURE 8: STATES THAT PROVIDE FIRE FUNDING TO LOCALITIES ..... 18

TABLE 7: PRIMARY SOURCES OF STATE FIRE/EMS FUNDS IN MID-ATLANTIC REGION ..... 19

KENTUCKY..... 19

NEW MEXICO..... 20

**RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 20**

DIRECT FUNDING TO LOCALITIES ..... 20

TABLE 8: ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FIRE/EMS PROVIDERS PER 1500 RESIDENTS ..... 22

TABLE 9: ESTIMATED COST OF DEDICATED FIRE AND EMS STAFFING ..... 22

CHANGES TO THE FIRE PROGRAMS FUND ..... 22

TABLE 10: CURRENT FIRE/EMS FUNDING PROVIDED BY INSURANCE SURCHARGES ..... 22

TABLE 11: INCREASES TO FIRE PROGRAMS FUND BASED OFF 2024 INSURANCE PREMIUMS ..... 23

REALLOCATION OF \$2 IN FOUR FOR LIFE ..... 24

ESTABLISHMENT OF A STAFFING GRANT..... 24

ESTABLISHMENT OF A LOW-INTEREST LOAN PROGRAM ..... 25

TABLE 12: LOAN AMOUNTS AND TERMS IN PENNSYLVANIA ..... 26

STATEWIDE EQUIPMENT CONTRACTS ..... 26

CONTINUED RESEARCH ..... 27

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

**REFERENCES..... 29**  
**APPENDIX ..... 30**  
HOUSE BILL 2175 (2023)..... 31  
LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF PUBLIC SAFETY..... 32  
LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF VDFP ..... 33

## **PREFACE**

The General Assembly required in House Bill 2175 (2023) that the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security establish a work group composed of representatives from the Department of Fire Programs, the Department of Planning and Budget, the Office of Emergency Medical Services, the Virginia Fire Services Council, Virginia's Regional EMS Councils, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations, and the House Committee on Appropriations to study existing fire service needs, analyze sustainability of funding, and review alternative funding models. The findings and recommendations are to be reported by the Secretary to the Chairmen of the House Committee on General Laws and the Senate Committee on General Laws and Technology, with a due date of October 1, 2023. This report represents the workgroup's fulfillment of the request on behalf of its secretariat.

## **WORKGROUP MEMBERS**

### *Office of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security*

Sonny Daniels, Assistant Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security

### *House Committee on Appropriations*

David Reynold, Legislative Fiscal Analyst

### *Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations*

Catie Robertson, Associate Legislative Fiscal Analyst

### *Department of Fire Programs*

Brad Creasy, Executive Director

Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

### *Department of Health's' Office of Emergency Medical Services*

Scott Winston, Assistant Director

Michael Berg, EMS Systems Funding

Mohamed Abbamin, Senior Policy Analyst

### *Department of Planning and Budget*

Banci Tewolde, Associate Director, Public Safety

Zachery Villegas, Budget and Policy Analyst

### *Virginia Fire Services Council*

Walter Bailey, Fire Chief of Phenix, VA

### *Virginia Fire Chief's Association*

Allen Baldwin, President

### *Virginia Association of Counties*

Jeremy Bennett, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs

### *Virginia Municipal League*

W. Pat Dent, Vice Mayor, Williamsburg, VA

### *Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads*

E. B "Bubby" Bish, Executive Director

### *Virginia Professional Fire Fighters*

William Boger, President IAFF Local 1568

### *Virginia State Firefighters Association*

James Stokely, Association Member

*Virginia Association of Governmental EMS Administrators*  
William “Billy” Ferguson, Chief of Franklin County Public Safety

*Old Dominion EMS Alliance*  
Walter Bailey, Vice Chair

*Central Shenandoah EMS Council*  
Daniel Linkins, Executive Director

*Tidewater EMS Council*  
David Long, Executive Director

*Western Virginia EMS Council*  
Stephen Simon, Executive Director

*Northern Virginia EMS Council*  
Raymond Whatley, Executive Director

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Providing fire and EMS services is a critical function for the safety and well-being of communities. *Code of Virginia* § 27-6.1. enables the governing body of any locality to establish a fire department while § 32.1-111.4:6 empowers them to establish an emergency medical services agency. Effective fire and EMS services can help contain the economic impact of emergencies. For example, prompt response and effective management of incidents can minimize property damage and reduce financial burdens on individuals and businesses. Virginia encompasses a wide spectrum of regions, ranging from urban centers to rural landscapes. The presence of dependable fire and EMS services serves as an additional incentive for individuals to consider interstate relocation, whether for professional or personal reasons.

The COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the adoption of remote work arrangements, has potentially altered work and lifestyle dynamics, subsequently influencing people's decisions on where to reside. This transformation in living preferences has, as a result, contributed to a significant increase in interstate relocations, as evidenced by the U.S. Census Bureau's June 2023 report on state-to-state migration.<sup>1</sup> However as the population continues to shift into more urban areas, it is imperative to acknowledge the strength of fire and EMS will continue to fluctuate across regions, contingent upon factors such as population density, available resources, and existing infrastructure.

The HB 2175 Workgroup, comprised of various state agencies and stakeholder groups, met to discuss current funding and its sustainability. The workgroup developed the Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey, the first statewide review of fire and EMS in recent memory. 87% of the state's cities and counties responded to the survey, representing almost 7.5 million Virginia citizens. This survey illustrated that pass-through funding, coupled with increasing call volume and decreasing volunteer providers, was leading to untenable situations in localities related to fire and EMS. Call volume in the last three years has increased by 40%, while state level funding for fire and EMS has increased by only 6.67%. In addition, rising prices for equipment is leading to older equipment and longer replacement plans.

Other states were examined to provide context on models of funding. Funding varies by state, with most having some type of grant funding available for fire and EMS. The amount and usefulness of the grants is not uniform from state to state. The workgroup noted that some states had programs that could assist Virginia fire and EMS agencies if adopted in Virginia, such as low interest loan programs, increases to insurance surcharges, and funding provided by the General Fund.

The workgroup recommends that the Virginia General Assembly consider multiple options to better protect citizens and assist localities with fire and EMS funding. Current funding is not sustainable for future growth in the Commonwealth. Direct funding for staffing, in a program similar to VA 599 funding or the funding of sheriff's offices is recommended. Additionally, raising the amount of funding for the Fire Programs Fund, as well as the establishment of a staffing grant program, would be beneficial. Other programs to consider include statewide equipment contracts and loan programs for fire departments and EMS agencies.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Going With the Flow: State to State Migration", *U.S Census Bureau*

## **HB 2175: ASSESSING FIRE SERVICE NEEDS, CURRENT FUNDING SUSTAINABILITY, AND ALTERNATIVE FUNDING MODELS**

The enactment of HB 2175, requesting the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security to initiate a work group aimed at assessing service needs, evaluating funding sustainability, and exploring alternative funding models, has yielded a reinforcing effect on the outcomes established by 32 prior fire and EMS studies within the last ten years. § 9.1-203.4 of the *Code of Virginia* facilitates the provision of complimentary technical assistance and guidance through Fire and Emergency Medical Services studies collaboratively conducted with entities like the Department of Fire Programs, Virginia Fire Services Board, Office of Emergency Medical Services within the Virginia Department of Health, and the Virginia Department of Forestry. These studies have been instrumental over the past decade, resulting in over 32 comprehensive Fire and EMS Studies conducted across the state. The underlying goal of these studies has been to present an unbiased evaluation of fire and EMS services within a specific local jurisdiction, shedding light on both successful aspects and areas that may warrant enhancement.

Virginia contends with a blend of workforce impediments, a concern that is particularly pronounced in rural regions, compounded by stagnant state-level funding over the past two decades. Confronting these challenges against a backdrop of diminished resources and reduced staffing levels, fire and EMS departments are compelled to innovate strategies that enable accomplishing more with limited resources.

A budget amendment requesting \$125,000 to facilitate the hiring of a consultant for the workgroup's tasks, including evaluating fire service needs, funding sustainability, and examining alternative funding models, was pursued. Despite this effort, the specified funds were not incorporated into the approved budget. Consequently, the accompanying report presents conclusions and suggestions derived from the workgroup's own proficiency and findings.

### **WORKGROUP HISTORY**

The HB 2175 Workgroup convened for the first time on May 1, 2023 to begin the process of completing the tasks mandated by the General Assembly. The workgroup met a total of seven times as outlined below.

The workgroup broke the tasks outlined by HB 2175 into three major areas: existing fire service needs, sustainability of current funding, and alternative funding models from other states. A subgroup was formed to create the Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey, which was released through a partnership between the Department of Fire Programs, Virginia Municipal League, and the Virginia Association of Counties to every city, county, and town in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The response rate for this survey was 87%, which did not include towns. Many towns were submitted as part of their respective county's submission. The workgroup was unable to track which towns were submitted as part of a county unless this was reported by the county. This survey provided important information and data regarding fire service needs and sustainability of current funding.

An additional subgroup was also created to examine other states funding models, with a specific focus on the Mid-Atlantic region. Other states were also considered through the assistance of the National Association of Counties and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Dates of HB 2175 Workgroup Meetings

May 1 <sup>st</sup>	July 31 <sup>st</sup>
May 18 <sup>th</sup>	August 15 <sup>th</sup>
June 5 <sup>th</sup>	September 5 <sup>th</sup>
June 29 <sup>th</sup>	

The Department of Fire Programs reviewed data submitted as part of the Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey, providing this data to the members of the workgroup. Data obtained from prior state studies and other agencies such as the Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Services was also included in the draft report.

Workgroup members made recommendations based off the data provided and a draft report was approved by the workgroup on September 5<sup>th</sup>.

**VIRGINIA FIRE AND EMS NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SURVEY**

The Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey provided a holistic picture of fire and EMS funding, staffing, needs, and capabilities from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Localities reported a total of 19,299 fire and EMS providers, both career and volunteer. The figures below break these numbers down by volunteer, career, and the role of the provider. Fire response providers have the primary role of fire protection, EMS providers have the primary role of emergency medicine, and combination providers serve a dual role of fire and EMS. Of note, the numbers below reflect the reported number of fire or EMS providers that participated in the assessment. Individual organizations, such as the Virginia Professional Fire Fighters, report a larger number of firefighters. Virginia does not define what a firefighter is or require minimum training, leading to difficulty when determining the number of active firefighters in the Commonwealth. The Federal Emergency Management Agency reports that in 2023, 70.7% of fire departments are volunteer, which is slightly above the national average of 70%.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE 1: CAREER AND VOLUNTEER FIRE AND EMS PROVIDERS IN VIRGINIA

Career Fire and EMS	Volunteer Fire and EMS
5635	13653

TABLE 2: ROLE OF CAREER STAFF BY NUMBER OF LOCALITIES

Fire Response Role	EMS Response Role	Combination Role
10	32	85

<sup>2</sup> “Virginia Fire Loss and Fire Department Profile”, *Federal Emergency Management Agency*

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

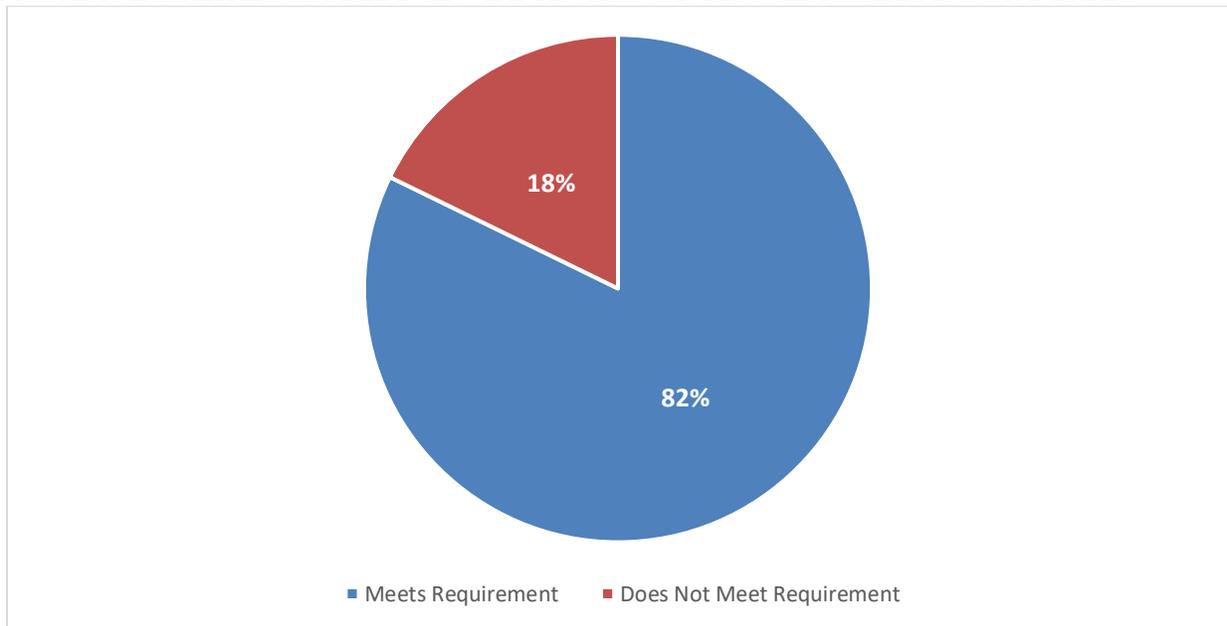
TABLE 3: VOLUNTEER FIRE AND EMS PROVIDERS BY ROLE

Fire Response Role	EMS Response Role	Combination Role
6407	3922	1238

The vast majority of suburban and rural areas reported career EMS personnel who were sometimes trained to assist with fire protection. These areas more heavily relied upon volunteer firefighters to provide fire protection. The survey found that 91% of respondents reported a decrease in volunteer fire and EMS providers over the past three years. Most localities stated that citizens’ financial constraints, employment policies, and a decreasing interest by younger generations were major contributors to the significant decline in volunteers.

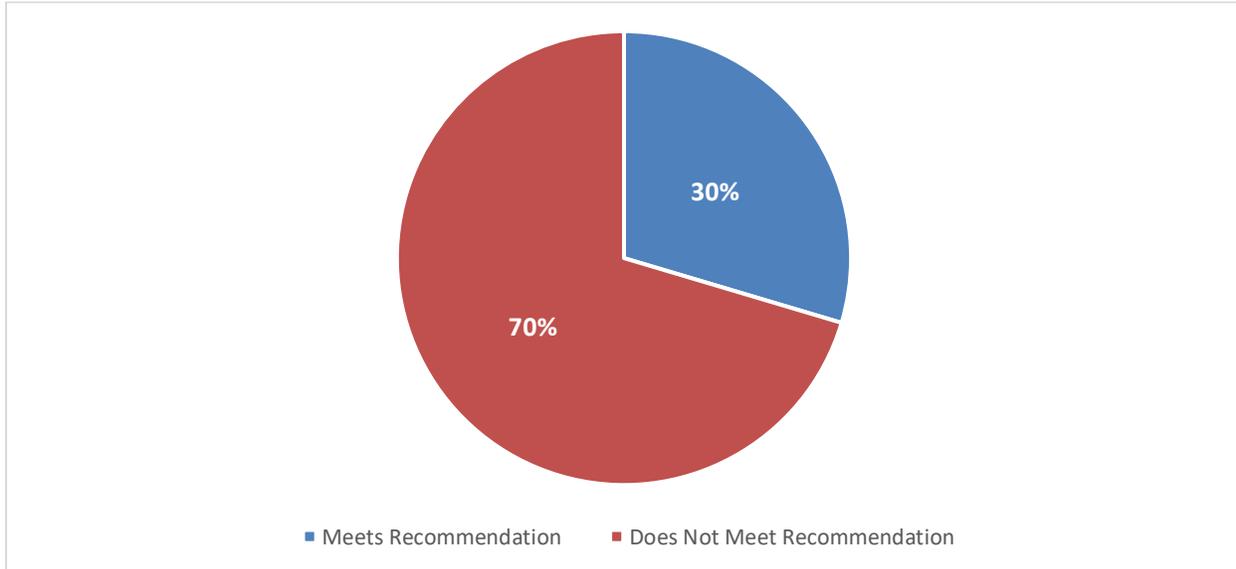
The decline in volunteer providers is directly related to the inability of Virginia’s fire and EMS service to provide adequate staffing for fire and EMS. 82% of localities, when asked if they met the minimum staffing standards required by regulation by the Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Services, stated that they always met the standard. This means that 18% of the Commonwealth is not protected adequately regarding EMS. In contrast, when asked if their locality met National Fire Protection Association standards regarding fire protection, 70% stated they could only sometimes, never or rarely meet these minimum standards for safety.<sup>3</sup>

FIGURE 1: LOCALITIES COMPLIANCE WITH 12VAC5-31-1230- EMS STAFFING STANDARDS



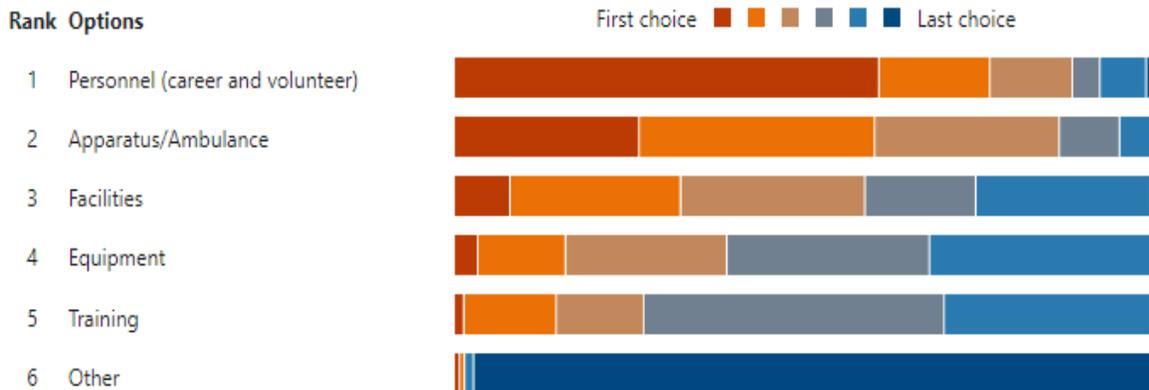
<sup>3</sup> NFPA 1720, *Standard on Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments* and NFPA 1710, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*

FIGURE 2: LOCALITIES ABILITY TO MEET NFPA 1710 (CAREER) OR 1720 (VOLUNTEER) STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS



61% of localities reported that personnel (both career and volunteer) was the biggest gap in fire and EMS. This was also the most requested area for additional funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

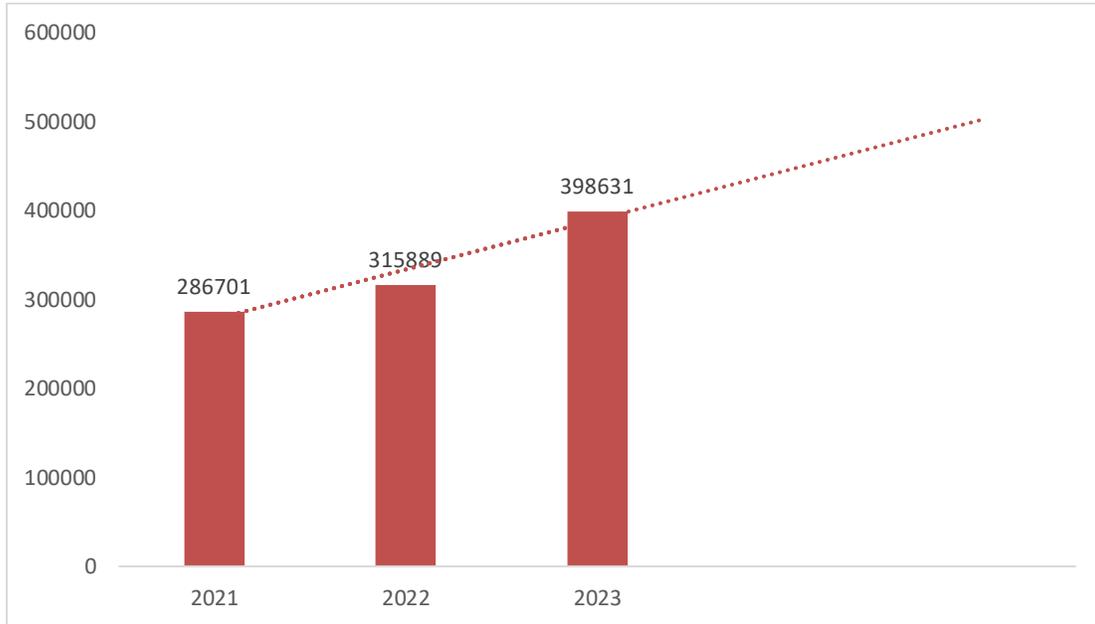
FIGURE 3: REPORTED FUNDING GAPS IN FIRE AND EMS BY LOCALITIES



Regarding the sustainability of pass-through funding, the Commonwealth of Virginia provides fire and EMS funding through grant programs administered by the Department of Fire Programs and the Office of Emergency Medical Services. The survey showed that most of the fire and EMS funding in the Commonwealth is provided by localities, with state grants supplementing funding in areas such as training and equipment. Limited private funding sources and federal grants were also available to localities.

In the past three years, calls for service have increased by 40%, while funding at the state level has remained relatively stable for 20 years. Localities reported that they could not keep up with the rising costs of providing fire and EMS services, often leading to contract providers providing minimal levels of service.

FIGURE 4: FIRE AND EMS CALL VOLUME REPORTED BY LOCALITIES



A crucial component of serving citizens are the vehicles that carry first responders to the emergency and the equipment used. Virginia localities reported 806 total fire apparatus (including engines, ladder trucks, tanker/tenders, brush units, and command units) and 242 ambulances. These numbers do not reflect data collected by other sources, such as the Office of Emergency Medical Services, which reports 2,169 licensed ambulances in the Commonwealth. The fire service standard for length of service for a piece of apparatus is twenty years, with approximately 20% of Virginia’s front-line apparatus being outside this timeline. Ambulances are recommended for a 10-year service life, with localities reporting that 14% are outside their service life. The cost of purchasing apparatus and equipment has increased substantially in recent years, outrunning most locality’s ability to fund or fundraise for replacements. In 1992, the cost of an ambulance was just over \$100,000. Today an ambulance costs on average \$325,000. The ancillary equipment of an ambulance has increased in overall costs as well. A stretcher, which were only \$2,500 in the 1990s, can now cost as much as \$40,000. The Virginia Office of EMS maintains a list of average EMS vehicle and equipment prices often requested under the Rescue Squad Assistance Fund Grant Program, with some of those cost increases shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: EMS SUPPLY COST INCREASES (OFFICE OF EMS)

Item	Cost Increase from Spring 23’ to Fall 23’
Automatic External Defibrator	45%
Ambulance Remount	17%
Chest Compression Devices	17%
Monitors with 12 Lead Capability	10.6%
Power Stair Chairs	40%

Additionally, one respondent provided the information below concerning the purchase of a standard fire suppression engine that meets NFPA requirements with little customization.

TABLE 5: SUPPLY COST INCREASES OF A STANDARD FIRE ENGINE

Year	Cost	Cost Increase
2020	\$591,000	N/A
2021	\$638,000	7.95%
2022	\$978,000	53.29%
2023	\$1,238,000	26.58%
Percent Increase 2020-2023:		109.48%

Both career and volunteer fire and EMS providers remain committed to serving their fellow citizens in the Commonwealth. However, the vast majority of Virginia’s fire and EMS service is currently understaffed and underfunded. The continuing decline of volunteer providers and rising costs for service will eventually outpace current funding models.

### CURRENT STATE FUNDING

The Commonwealth of Virginia provides funding for fire and EMS through grants administered by the Department of Fire Programs or the Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Services. These grant programs represent the sole, continuing sources of state funding for fire and EMS. These funds are pass-through funds only and do not represent direct funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia. In the total public safety budget for the Commonwealth of Virginia in FY 2022, there was no direct funding allocated for fire and EMS in localities. This has been the case for fire and EMS since the state began offering pass-through funding.

### DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS GRANTS

The Department of Fire Programs administers grants that derive from the Fire Programs Fund in five areas. The Virginia Fire Programs Fund is derived from one percent of fire-related insurance coverage. Only one of the five grants is guaranteed to localities each fiscal year if they meet certain reporting requirements. Localities reported that these grants were too limited in scope to alleviate current funding shortfalls regarding staffing and equipment. Aid To Localities (ATL) has increased at a marginal rate over the past three fiscal years, with each locality receiving a minimum of \$30,000 for counties/cities and \$15,000 for towns.

TABLE 6: AID TO LOCALITY FUNDING INCREASES FY21-FY23

Fiscal Year	ATL Total	ATL Increase	Percent Increase
2021	\$32,308,537	\$2,201,026	7%
2022	\$34,121,014	\$1,812,477	6%
2023	\$36,409,201	\$2,288,187	7%
Total:	\$102,838,752	\$6,301,690	12.69%

*Aid-to-Localities (ATL):* Approximately 75 percent of the total fund goes directly to counties, cities and incorporated towns within the Commonwealth as Aid-to-Localities (ATL). ATL provides Virginia cities, towns and counties with funds to pay for training, construction of training centers, firefighting equipment and protective clothing. Allocations are based on population. ATL funds “shall be used solely for the purposes of (i) training volunteer or career

firefighting personnel in each of the receiving localities; (ii) funding fire prevention and public safety education programs; (iii) constructing, improving, and expanding regional or local fire service training facilities; (iv) purchasing emergency medical care and equipment for fire personnel; (v) payment of personnel costs related to fire and medical training for fire personnel; (vi) purchasing personal protective equipment, vehicles, equipment, and supplies for use in the receiving locality specifically for fire service purposes; or (vii) providing training and education and purchasing products, including personal protective equipment, diesel exhaust removal systems, decontamination equipment, and commercial extractors, that are designed to reduce the incidence of cancer among firefighters” (*Code of Virginia* § 38.2-401)

*Live Fire Training Structure Grant Program:* In accordance with §38.2-401-D of the *Code of Virginia*, the Live Fire Training Structure Grant Program was established to provide defined grants to Virginia localities seeking to construct, renovate (including additions), or repair permanent Live Fire Training Structures in accordance with the most current edition of NFPA 1402. The term Live Fire Training Structure refers to a structure specifically designed for conducting live fire training evolutions on a repetitive basis in accordance with the most current edition of NFPA 1001 and 1403.

*VFIRS Hardware Grants:* The purpose of this grant program is to provide an incentive to those jurisdictions not currently participating in VFIRS by lessening the economic burden. VFIRS is the Virginia component of the National Fire Incident Reporting System, which tracks fire and emergency reports nationwide.

*Regional Fire Services Training Grant Program:* The funding will be utilized for the acquisition, renovation, repair, service, and management of fire services training props to provide training opportunities to multiple jurisdictions in support of training throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia per the NFPA 1001 and 1403 training standards.

*Conference & Education:* The purpose of the Conference and Education Assistance program is to provide needed financial support for conferences and seminars sponsored by Virginia-based non-profit organizations that further the education of fire and emergency services personnel throughout the Commonwealth.

#### **OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES GRANTS**

OEMS relies on funding from a vehicle registration program through the Department of Motor Vehicles, known as the “Four and a quarter (\$4.25) for Life” - EMS Fund, detailed in *Code of Virginia* § 46.2-694. Each vehicle registration in Virginia includes a \$6.25 fee dedicated to EMS support in the state. Out of this, \$2.00 is channeled back to the General Fund, amounting to \$12.5M. Additionally, around \$3.1M is reserved from the Rescue Squad Assistance Fund and a special EMS fund to support the Virginia State Police Med-Flight program.

Out of the \$6.25 fee, \$.25 goes to the Rescue Squad Assistance Fund (RSAF) exclusively for EMS personnel certification and recertification training and testing expenses. The remaining \$4.00 contributes to the RSAF, Return to Localities (RTL) fund, and the direct OEMS funding, specifically designated for EMS-related uses:

- 32% is directed to the Rescue Squad Assistance Fund.

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

- 30% is utilized for:
  - EMS and Advanced Life Support training.
  - Recruitment and retention programs.
  - Development and enhancement of the EMS system.
  - Contracts at local, regional, and state levels for EMS.
  - Technological and communication improvements.
  - Emergency readiness and response.
- 26% goes to the “Return to Locality” fund to assist local efforts, including:
  - Training for EMS staff.
  - Purchasing emergency medical and rescue equipment and supplies.
- 10% supports the Virginia OEMS operations.
- 2% is allocated to the Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads for volunteer-related activities, such as recruitment, retention, and training.

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF AGENCIES IMPACTED BY RESCUE SQUAD ASSISTANCE FUND

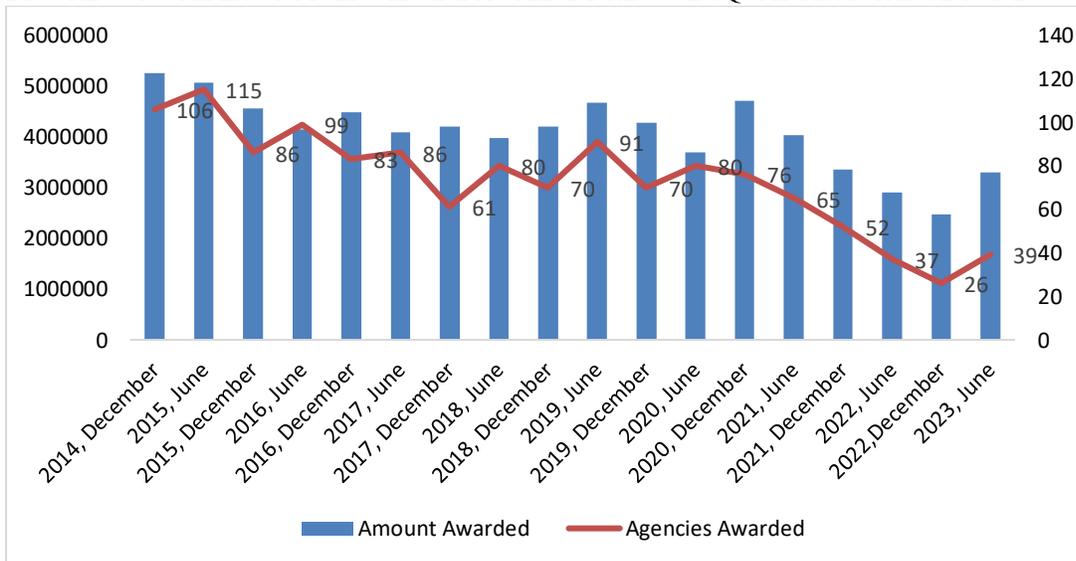
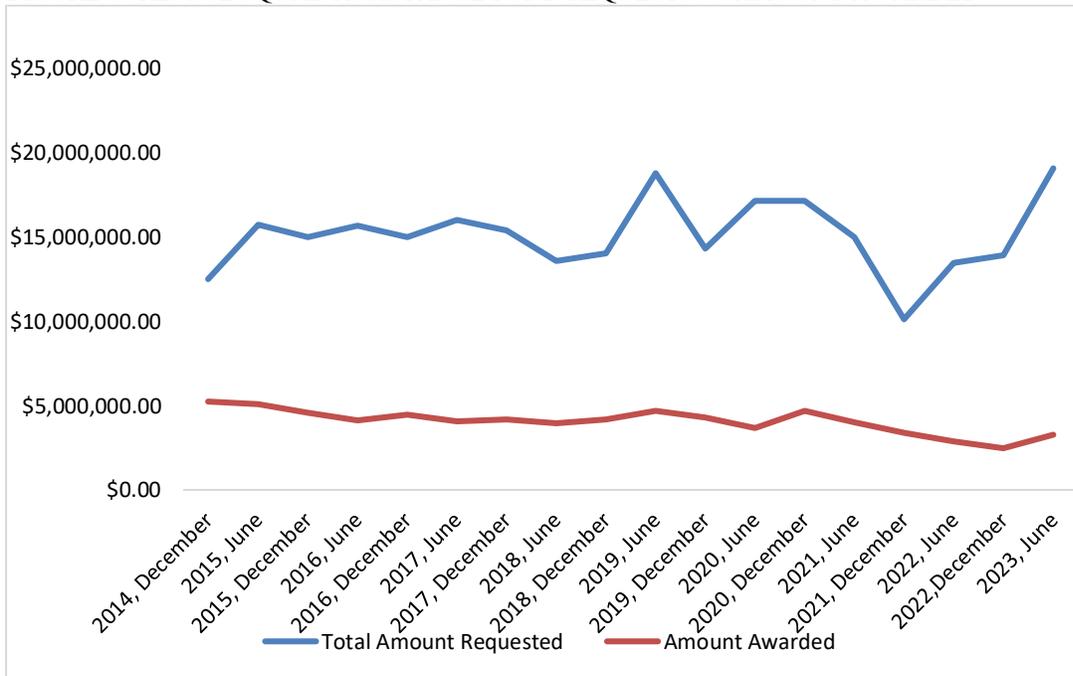


FIGURE 6: RESCUE SQUAD ASSISTANCE FUND REQUESTS V. AMOUNT AWARDED



The Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services grant programs have not received an increase in funds since 2002, when funding was increased to four dollars per registration. In 2008, an additional twenty-five cents was added for training related to EMT certification only, and in 2010 a budget amendment added an additional two dollars for use in the General Fund. Only \$4.25 from each registration is provided directly to EMS through the Office of EMS.

Requests for state EMS grants has increased dramatically in recent years, with 19 million dollars in requests made in June 2023 with only 3.2 million dollars in funding available. Additionally, rising costs for equipment and supplies results in fewer agencies being awarded grants. In June 2015, 115 agencies were awarded grants through the Rescue Squad Assistance Fund. In the most recent grant cycle conducted in June 2023, only 39 agencies received funding. As costs continue to grow, current funding for the Rescue Squad Assistance Fund will be inadequate to support EMS agencies across the Commonwealth.

## OTHER STATES

Funding models for other states vary widely from coast to coast. Information collected by the workgroup, as well as from the United States Fire Administration, did not lead to conclusive evidence of a standard state system of funding. Several states do not provide any funding for fire and EMS other than pass through federal funding or funding related to wildland fires.

FIGURE 7: STATES THAT PROVIDE EMS FUNDING TO LOCALITIES

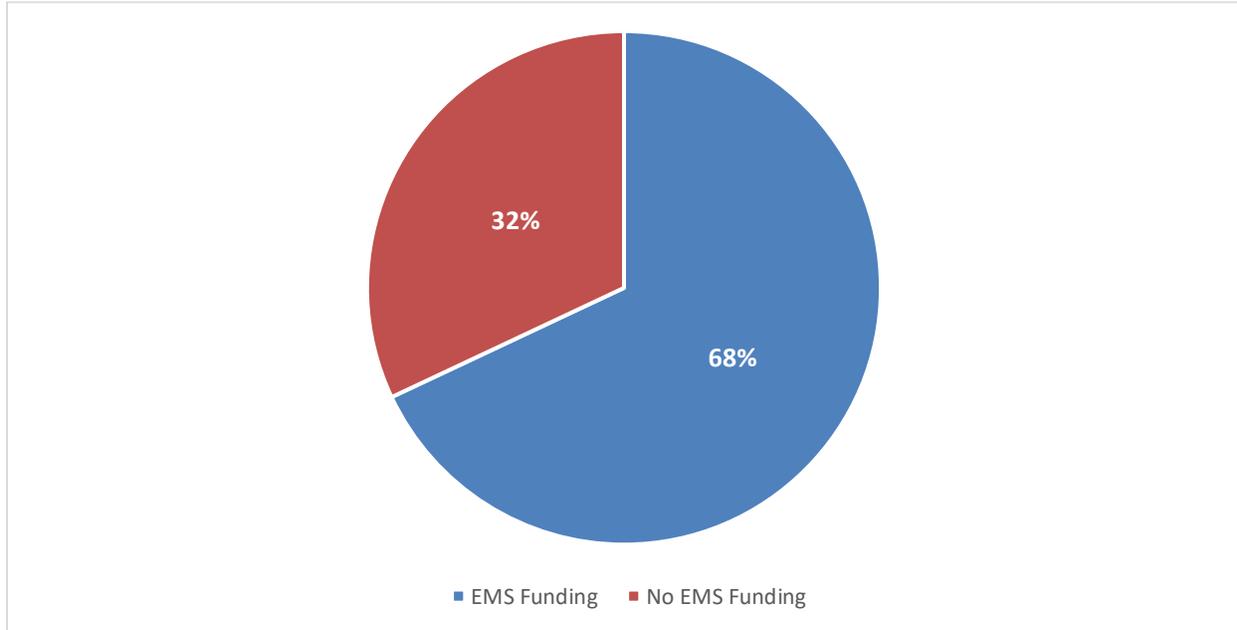
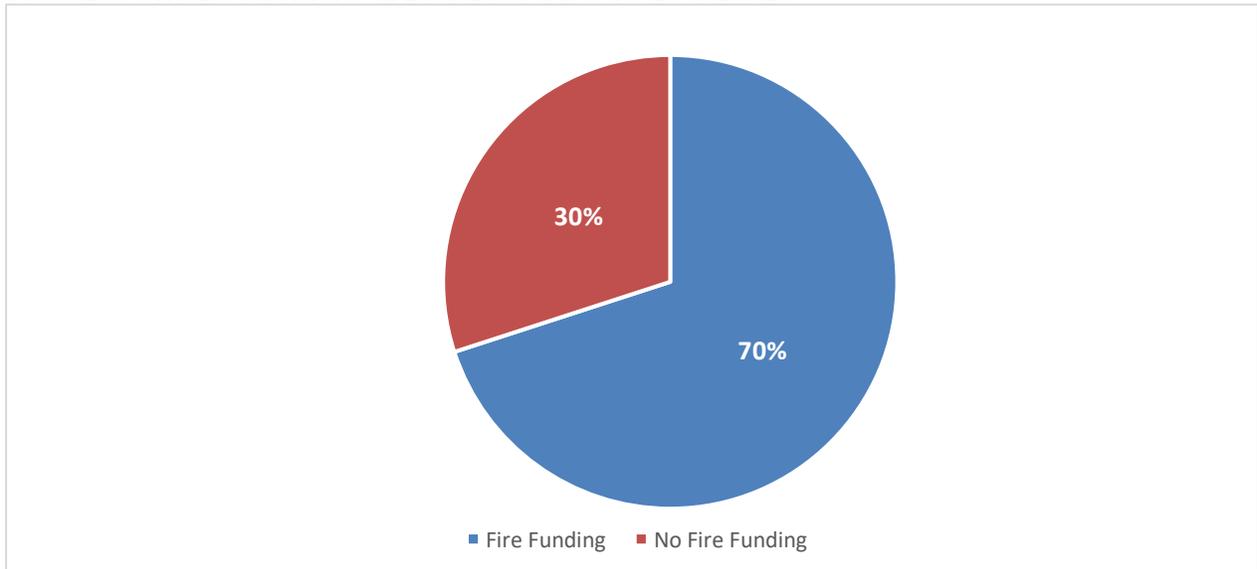


FIGURE 8: STATES THAT PROVIDE FIRE FUNDING TO LOCALITIES



The majority of fire and EMS is funded by local property taxes across the United States. Many states reported issues similar to Virginia concerning localities inability to keep pace with growing demands on fire and EMS.

Common sources for states providing fire and EMS funding include a percentage of fire insurance rates, statewide fire taxes, surcharges on traffic citations, and in limited cases, funding derived from the general fund of the state. Common types of funding that states provide to localities include grants for training, surplus vehicle programs, state level contracts for purchasing, and low-interest loans for fire or EMS agencies.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE 7: PRIMARY SOURCES OF STATE FIRE/EMS FUNDS IN MID-ATLANTIC REGION

State	EMS Funding	Fire Funding
Virginia	\$4.25 per registration of a motor vehicle	1% surcharge on fire, casualty, and marine insurance
Delaware	Limited General Fund	Limited General Fund
Maryland	\$29 per registration of a motor vehicle and \$7.50 from moving violations	
New Jersey	Limited General Fund	General Fund, interest from loan payments
North Carolina	18 cents of vehicle inspection sticker cost	.74% surcharge on property insurance
West Virginia	Specially Funded Projects Only	1% surcharge on fire and casualty insurance

The below examples highlight state models for funding selected by the workgroup as possible examples of actions that Virginia can undertake to better support fire and EMS.

### KENTUCKY

Kentucky offers a variety of programs to address fire and EMS funding in localities. The state provides funding for local EMS organizations through its Search and Rescue Aid Program, which was formed to “Reduce and prevent the loss of life by creating a better equipped, trained, and coordinated rescue force throughout the Commonwealth; (2) Upgrade the capabilities of local rescue squads by providing financial assistance to be used to purchase equipment and obtain training; (3) Encourage the development of rescue squads where none exist.”<sup>5</sup> This competitive grant process is the only state funding for EMS.

The Kentucky Fire Commission offers a number of programs directed at assisting fire departments in the state. These include a State Aid Program that provides money directly to every registered fire department in the state if certain requirements are met, grants for training facilities, low interest loans, and some free vaccinations for fire and EMS providers. In addition, Kentucky covers workers compensation for all volunteer firefighters and death benefits for career and volunteer firefighters. The commission also provides incentive funding for career firefighters who complete minimum training hours each year totaling \$4,000 per firefighter.<sup>6</sup>

The Commonwealth of Virginia does not offer similar coverage for volunteer firefighters regarding workers compensation, low interest loans, or incentive funding for career firefighters.

<sup>4</sup> “Funding Alternatives for Fire and Emergency Services”, United States Fire Administration

<sup>5</sup> “FY 2023 Funding Opportunity Announcement”, *Kentucky Emergency Management*

<sup>6</sup> *Kentucky Revised Statutes* § 95A.250

## NEW MEXICO

New Mexico provides funding to localities for both fire and EMS through grants similar to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Emergency Medical Services Fund Act was established to make state funds “available to municipalities and counties, in proportion to their needs, for use in the establishment and enhancement of local emergency medical services in order to reduce injury and loss of life.”<sup>7</sup> 75% of the funding provided for in the program goes directly to localities for the enhancement of local EMS, operational costs other than salaries, vehicles, equipment, and the implementation of prevention programs. These funds are issued via a funding formula that takes into account applications by local EMS organizations, as well as available funds and the area being served (population and land mass). An additional 18% of the fund is for special projects that improve a local system or the statewide system. 4% is directed towards the trauma system in the state, with the remaining 3% for the administration of regional EMS offices.<sup>8</sup>

A Fire Protection Fund was established by New Mexico and utilizes a 3% premium on certain lines of insurance. These funds are distributed based on a local departments Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating that analyzes the number of stations in a region, apparatus and equipment, the number of personnel able to respond within each district, and access to water resources, among other factors. A department rated by the ISO as a “1” receives \$82,592 as a base and an additional \$30,606 for each additional station each year.<sup>9</sup> Additional funds are available from the State Fire Marshal’s Office to fund special projects and critical needs through a competitive grant process. These are approved by the Fire Grant Council, made up of experienced firefighters and officials from across the state.<sup>10</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### I. DIRECT FUNDING TO LOCALITIES FOR FIRE AND EMS

The HB 2175 Workgroup recommends direct funding to localities for fire and EMS. As previously noted, Virginia currently offers grants available to localities in limited areas. These grants often do not provide enough support or cannot be utilized for areas like staffing. The workgroup recommends that the General Assembly create a dedicated funding stream, like the State Aid to Localities with Police Departments (599) or the Staffing Standards for Sheriff’s Offices.

#### State Aid to Localities with Police Departments (599)

State Aid to Localities with Police Departments, commonly known as 599 funds, are distributed by the Department of Criminal Justice Services to eligible cities, towns, and counties that operate police departments and meet certain reporting requirements. *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-165 defines state aid to localities with police as the “amount which bears the same relationship to the population served by police departments as state aid to sheriff-only localities bears to the population served by sheriffs only”. The funding formula for 599 funds is often set in the Appropriations Act, being adjusted by the General Assembly each year. For FY2024, the Department of Criminal Justice

---

<sup>7</sup> “Emergency Medical Services Fund Act”, *New Mexico Department of Health*

<sup>8</sup> *New Mexico Administrative Code* § 7.27.4

<sup>9</sup> *New Mexico Statutes* § 59A-53-4

<sup>10</sup> “How it works: funding New Mexico’s fire departments”, *New Mexico State Fire Marshal*

Services reports that \$219,650,081 will be distributed to eligible jurisdictions. This funding is provided by the General Fund of the Commonwealth of Virginia.<sup>11</sup>

Staffing Standards for Sheriff's Offices

Staffing Standards for Sheriff's Offices is provided in *Code of Virginia* § 15.2-1609.1, which outlines that the Commonwealth of Virginia provide one deputy per 1,500 residents in a locality. Further, the Virginia Acts of Assembly provide a locality with a minimum of five deputies regardless of population.<sup>12</sup> These funds are distributed by the Compensation Board and are derived from the General Fund of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Recommendation:**

The Constitution of Virginia specifies the duties of the sheriff as a constitutional officer, while various other sections of the *Code of Virginia* specify the role of law enforcement. Citizens expect law enforcement, as well as fire and EMS, to be available when an emergency occurs. However, localities do not receive funds to provide fire and EMS in the same manner as law enforcement. The Virginia General Assembly should consider the funding of dedicated staffing for fire and EMS in localities. Fire and EMS funding could flow through the Department of Fire Programs, the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Emergency Medical Services, or another entity. The Virginia Compensation Board, because of its current focus and mission of supporting constitutional officers, may not be the most effective means of distributing funds to a non-constitutional office. This funding should be based on a combination of the following:

Population  
Land Area  
Call Volume

In order to accomplish this recommendation, the General Assembly may wish to consider a minimum training requirement as found in the law enforcement programs and reporting requirements. Currently, there is no minimum training requirements for firefighters in the Commonwealth of Virginia. EMS providers are typically required to be an Emergency Medical Technician at a minimum to provide patient care. Localities should be required to have some form of minimum training for staffing funding to ensure that state funding is utilized for the effective distribution of emergency services.

The potential cost to provide dedicated funding for fire and EMS staffing utilizing the sheriff's office formula developed by the Compensation Board would be approximately \$255,294,900.

---

<sup>11</sup> "State Aid to Localities With Police Departments ("599")", *Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services*

<sup>12</sup> "Staffing Standards for Sheriff's Offices", *Virginia Compensation Board*

TABLE 8: ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FIRE/EMS PROVIDERS PER 1500 RESIDENTS

Population	Sheriff's Office Standard	Number of Fire and EMS Providers Covered
8,686,619	1,500	5,789

TABLE 9: ESTIMATED COST OF DEDICATED FIRE AND EMS STAFFING

FIRE AND EMS PROVIDERS	PAY SET BY COMPENSATION BOARD	TOTAL
5,789	\$44,100	\$255,294,900

**II. CHANGES TO THE FIRE PROGRAMS FUND**

The Fire Programs Fund currently assesses one percent of the total direct gross premium insurance for 5 insurance areas: fire, casualty, marine, homeowners, and farm owners. The current one percent rate was increased from 8/10 of a percent by Chapter 615 during the 1995 General Assembly session. Since 1995, no other increases have been seen in the rate funding the Fire Programs Fund. Increasing costs and demand for service require changes to the Fire Programs Fund to keep pace with current growth in the Commonwealth of Virginia. An increase in the percentage of direct gross premium insurance would further fund fire department activities and bring Virginia's rate in line with other states that have similar programs as shown below. Furthermore, changes to the *Code of Virginia* to broaden the usefulness of funding provided by the Fire Programs fund are also recommended.

TABLE 10: CURRENT FIRE/EMS FUNDING PROVIDED BY INSURANCE SURCHARGES

State	Insurance Rate Providing Funds	Policy Types
Virginia	1%	fire, casualty, marine, homeowners, and farm owners <sup>13</sup>
Kentucky	1.8%	All insurers, other than life and health <sup>14</sup>
North Dakota	2% Life Insurance 1.75% Accident and Health 1.75% other insurance	Life, accident, health, and other insurance <sup>15</sup>
New Mexico	3%	Private passenger automobile, homeowners, farm owners, casualty, other property <sup>16</sup>
North Carolina	.74%	Fire, farm owners, multiple peril, homeowners, marine, earthquake, private passenger, commercial automobile, aircraft, boiler and machinery, wind <sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> § 38.2-401, *Code of Virginia*

<sup>14</sup> *Kentucky Revised Statutes* § 136.392

<sup>15</sup> *North Dakota Century Code* § 26.1-03-17

<sup>16</sup> *New Mexico Statutes* § 59A-6-1.2

<sup>17</sup> *North Carolina General Statute* § 105-228.5

Changes to the *Code of Virginia* to broaden the usefulness of funding provided by the Fire Programs fund are also recommended. 75% of the fund provides money directly to localities through Aid-To-Localities. These funds can only be used by localities for training volunteer or career firefighting, funding fire prevention and public safety education programs, constructing, improving, and expanding regional or local fire service training facilities, purchasing emergency medical care and equipment for fire personnel, payment of personnel costs related to training, or purchasing personal protective equipment, vehicles, equipment, and supplies for use in the receiving locality specifically for fire service purposes. The remainder of the fund is utilized to fund the Virginia Department of Fire Programs.

**Recommendation:**

The HB 2175 Workgroup recommends that the General Assembly increase the surcharge on insurance premiums for the Fire Programs Fund and loosen restrictions on the use of funds.

As noted, the percentage of insurance premiums that fund the Fire Programs Fund has not increased since 1995. Additionally, other states have higher rates that provide greater funding for their respective funds. The Virginia General Assembly should consider increasing the rate by .25 of a percent each year for the next four fiscal years and requiring that this funding go directly to localities through Aid-To-Localities. This would lead to a gradual increase in the total interest rate to 2.0% by fiscal year 2028. An increase in rates is shown below with the corresponding increase in available funding based off the 2024 Fire Programs Fund collection amount. Of note, the 1% rate is the actual amount available to localities in Fiscal Year 2024. The percentage increases suggested below would better assist localities with providing fire and EMS services. However, the workgroup does not feel that only incremental increases to Aid-To-Localities through the Fire Programs Fund is sustainable to provide needed funding long term.

TABLE 11: INCREASES TO FIRE PROGRAMS FUND BASED OFF 2024 INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Interest Rate	Aid to Localities Funds
1%	\$40,530,830 <sup>18</sup>
1.10%	\$44,583,913
1.25%	\$50,663,538
1.5%	\$60,796,245
2.0%	\$81,061,660

In addition, the use of ATL should be broadened to encompass any funding needed for firefighting with minor exceptions. As noted, current restrictions limit the use of ATL funds to three areas: training, fire prevention and education, and purchasing items such protective equipment, apparatus, and equipment. The Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey noted that apparatus was an area that required additional funding, ranking second behind staffing. The workgroup recommends that

<sup>18</sup> “Aid to Localities (ATL) FY 2024 Allocations”, *Virginia Department of Fire Programs*

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

the General Assembly broaden the use of ATL to include staffing and facility upgrades. The workgroup also recommends that if ATL is broadened, that restrictions be in place to prevent ATL funds from being utilized for investments, operating expenses, paying of debt, or the payment of taxes and fees. ATL funding should continue to be utilized to provide training or increase a locality's ability to provide services in the community.

Some localities choose to carry over ATL funds year after year to support long term programs, such as personal protective equipment or apparatus. These funds are often shown as unexpended but are still utilized for fire related expenses in subsequent fiscal years.

### **III. REALLOCATION OF \$2 IN FOUR FOR LIFE**

In reviewing the data, every vehicle registration in Virginia carries a \$6.25 fee designated for EMS support. However, only \$4.25 of this directly aids EMS, with the residual \$2 channeled into the General Fund, leading to an annual aggregate of approximately \$12.5M. Some of these funds are utilized for other public safety purposes, while the use of other portions of the funds could not be determined by the workgroup.

#### **Recommendation:**

The HB 2175 Workgroup advocates that the \$2, currently directed to the General Fund, be channeled back to the Office of EMS to better align with its original intended purpose. These funds could be utilized to support additional EMS needs through preestablished programs like those mentioned above under "Current State Funding". Of note, the workgroup emphasizes that such a financial shift would not diminish funds dedicated to other Virginia public safety partners including the State Police, Department of Corrections, and the Department of Emergency Management.

### **IV. ESTABLISHMENT OF A STAFFING GRANT**

The workgroup found that the most concerning trend in fire and EMS in Virginia is the lack of staffing available. As noted, staffing was the most requested area for state funding in the Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey. Currently, Four for Life funds can be utilized for staffing, but the nature of the grant program does not provide stability that is required when funding staff positions. The workgroup also notes that a staffing grant must not only fund positions, but also recruitment and retention that could be utilized by volunteer organizations.

#### **Staffing For Adequate Fire And Emergency Response (SAFER)**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency provides Staffing For Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grants, commonly referred to as SAFER. SAFER grants were first authorized in 2004 after federal concerns about adequate firefighter staffing. The SAFER Act authorizes grants to local fire departments for the purpose of increasing the number of firefighters to help communities meet industry-minimum standards and attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. SAFER grants can be utilized to hire additional staff, retain

firefighters facing an imminent layoff, or provide recruitment and retention tools to volunteer fire departments<sup>19</sup>.

**Recommendation:**

The HB 2175 Workgroup recommends that the General Assembly create a staffing grant program similar to SAFER that would be funded by either the General Fund or an increase to the Fire Programs Fund. This grant should be available to localities and provide the same opportunities as SAFER, such as the hiring of fire/EMS personnel and recruitment and retention programs. This grant program should provide the necessary funds for localities who are approved for grants to provide salary and benefits to personnel for a set period of time, with the locality assuming responsibility for the position after this period of time.

If funding is derived from an increase in the Fire Programs Fund, grants could be administered by the Department of Fire Programs, while the Virginia Fire Services Board could serve as the review body for grant applications as is currently done for other Fire Programs Fund grants in the Commonwealth. However, the ability of EMS only agencies to request grants through the Department of Fire Programs would require collaboration with the Office of Emergency Medical Services and changes to the *Code of Virginia* regarding the use of the Fire Programs Fund.

A more streamlined grant program could be created if funding is derived from the General Fund, similar to how SAFER is funded at the federal level. The General Assembly could designate the Department of Fire Programs, Office of Emergency Medical Services, or a commission composed of both agencies to award staffing grants from this newly funded grant program to both fire and EMS agencies.

If a SAFER grant program is established, additional staff would need to be considered for the Department of Fire Programs and Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Services to administer the grant program.

**V. ESTABLISHMENT OF A LOW-INTEREST LOAN PROGRAM**

Research into other state models suggest that low-interest loan programs for fire and EMS organizations could reduce costs incurred by these agencies when purchasing essential equipment. States such as Pennsylvania and Kentucky offer low interest loan programs as outlined in their respective code.

Pennsylvania offers loans through the Office of the State Fire Commissioner for apparatus, facilities, and equipment. The loans are set at a fixed 2% interest rate with the loan amount depending on the request of the local fire/EMS agency and the availability of funds. Pennsylvania sets a maximum loan amount depending on the request, as outlined below. Further information can be found in the “Rules and Regulations for the Fire and Emergency Services Loan Program”. Pennsylvania requires apparatus or equipment to meet NFPA standards if a loan is being requested.

---

<sup>19</sup> “Staffing For Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)”, *Federal Emergency Management Agency*

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

Additional funds can be secured if the equipment or apparatus is manufactured in Pennsylvania<sup>20</sup>.

TABLE 12: LOAN AMOUNTS AND TERMS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Loan Amount	Loan Term
Less than \$50,000	10 years
\$50,000 - \$300,00	20 years
Loan above \$300,000	30 years

Kentucky offers loans through the Kentucky Fire Commission for apparatus, certain types of equipment, and facilities. The loans are set at a fixed rate of 3% with a maximum loan amount of \$125,000 for all requests. Only volunteer fire departments are eligible for the loan and must be in good standing with the Kentucky Fire Commission. Equipment and apparatus must meet NFPA standards<sup>21</sup>.

**Recommendation:**

The HB 2175 Workgroup recommends that the General Assembly create a low-interest loan program similar to those outlined above that would be funded by the General Fund and future interest payments in the program. This low-interest loan program could be operationally administered through the Department of Accounts, with approval for loans resting with a joint committee consisting of members of the Virginia Fire Services Board and the State Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board. The amount of loans issued by the committee should be determined by the availability of funds from the General Assembly and other application requirements that could be developed by the joint committee. The workgroup recommends that the loan program be funded at a minimum of 15 million dollars, with the possibility for additional allocations in subsequent years. Of note, Pennsylvania funded the initial program through the issuance of bonds in 1975, 1981, 1990, and 2002 totaling 100 million dollars.<sup>22</sup>

**VI. STATEWIDE EQUIPMENT CONTRACTS**

The current market for purchasing fire and EMS equipment has seen a dramatic increase in costs as noted above. The days of volunteer organizations fundraising for fire engines, ambulances, and the equipment contained on them is no longer a viable option with the cost of these vehicles reaching over a million dollars in many cases. In addition, localities reported seeing an increase in production timelines, often requiring current apparatus and equipment to serve longer than anticipated. Fire and EMS stakeholders report 1-2 year wait times for new apparatus and equipment.

The Department of General Services’ Office of Fleet Management Services currently oversees the statewide fleet of approximately 4,000 vehicles, manages fuel contracts,

<sup>20</sup> “Fire and Emergency Medical Services Loan Program”, PA *Office of the State Fire Commissioner*

<sup>21</sup> “Low Interest Loans”, *Kentucky Fire Commission*

<sup>22</sup> “2023-2024 Executive Budget of Pennsylvania”, *Pennsylvania Office of the Governor*

and provides short-term rental contracts for state government and local governments. Most of these vehicles are not emergency vehicles and operate for standard business purposes.

Additionally, the Virginia Information Technology Agency offers a variety of information technology contracts for use by localities and state government. These contracts aggregate demand, often reducing prices and bringing more value to the entity utilizing the contract.

The workgroup understands that an “one size fits all” approach for fire or EMS apparatus and equipment will not necessarily work for every locality. The workgroup also notes that the Office of Emergency Medical Services did offer a state contract for ambulances that was underutilized and ultimately discontinued. However, state level contracts may help localities reduce costs and delivery time of equipment and apparatus. The following recommendation does not require a locality to participate or create a uniform specification for fire and EMS equipment in Virginia.

**Recommendation:**

The HB 2175 Workgroup recommends that the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and the Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Services work with the Department of General Services to establish statewide contracts for fire and EMS apparatus and equipment where appropriate. While in development of these contracts, the agencies should approach localities about the nature of the contracts and what should be included. Localities should be encouraged to utilize these contracts if their development is deemed feasible by VDFP, OEMS, and DGS.

Regarding apparatus, multiple options should be included in the contract if feasible. The workgroup recognizes that specific components of apparatus, such as the size of the water tank, can vary based on geography and preference of the locality. This is also true of ladder trucks, tanker/tenders, and other emergency vehicles. The contract should lay out basic specifications and costs, with localities having the ability to fund additions to the apparatus.

The Department of Fire Programs, Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Services, and the Department of General Services should report their findings to the Virginia Fire Services Board and State EMS Advisory Board within 18 months of the publication of this report. This information should be provided to the Virginia General Assembly if requested.

**VII. CONTINUED RESEARCH**

The HB 2175 Workgroup believes that the issue of fire/EMS funding in the Commonwealth requires immediate action by the General Assembly to address the concerning trends related to staffing and the purchase of equipment and apparatus across the Commonwealth. Although fire/EMS is not defined legally as an essential service, citizens expect fire and EMS to be present in an emergency. Without action, fire and EMS will continue to struggle to meet demands, possibly leading to negative

outcomes for citizens and future growth in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This issue cannot be addressed overnight, requiring long term planning to better protect the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Recommendation:**

The HB 2175 Workgroup recommends that the General Assembly continue to research fire and EMS funding through the following options. The possibility of continuing research does not suggest that other changes should not be made now.

1. Request that the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) complete a study of fire and EMS funding in the Commonwealth in a similar manner to the HB 2175 Workgroup. JLARC evaluates programs, conducts policy analysis, and provides oversight of state agencies on behalf of the Virginia General Assembly. JLARC has a proven track record of providing comprehensive and accurate reporting. A JLARC report may provide a longer ranging review of Virginia's fire and EMS funding.
2. Pass legislation that continues the work of the HB 2175 Workgroup. The current workgroup will cease to exist once this report is submitted on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023. The workgroup consists of many relevant stakeholders who have subject matter expertise on fire and EMS. Many have served at the local level and can continue to provide advice to the General Assembly and the Commonwealth of Virginia about future actions. Further work can also be done with the Virginia Fire and EMS Needs Assessment and Survey.
3. Fund an independent consultant to study fire and EMS in Virginia. Funding was not provided for an independent consultant to study fire and EMS as a part of the HB 2175 Workgroup. The workgroup recommends that this be considered in the future to provide outside knowledge and expertise from an entity independent from the Commonwealth of Virginia or its fire and EMS stakeholders.
4. Require that the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security have a fire and EMS liaison in their office. This position could work with the Department of Fire Programs and the Office of Emergency Medical Services, which falls under the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, on fire and EMS specific issues. This could include the continuing improvement and study of how the Commonwealth of Virginia funds and assists localities with fire and EMS.

## REFERENCES

“Aid to Localities (ATL) FY 2024 Allocations”. (2024). *Virginia Department of Fire Programs*.  
<https://www.vafire.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FY2024-Allocations-June-2023.pdf>

Code of Virginia § 38.2-401

“Emergency Medical Services Fund Act”. (2022) *New Mexico Department of Health*.  
<https://www.nmhealth.org/about/erd/emsb/fund/>

“Fire and Emergency Medical Services Loan Program”. (2023). *Pennsylvania Office of the State Fire Commissioner*.  
<https://www.osfc.pa.gov/GrantsandLoans/FEMSLP/Pages/default.aspx>

“Funding Alternatives for Fire and Emergency Services”. (2012). *United States Fire Administration*.

“Funding Alternatives for Fire and Emergency Services”. (1999). *United States Fire Administration*.

“FY 2023 Funding Opportunity Announcement”. (2023). *Kentucky Emergency Management*.  
<https://kyem.ky.gov/sargrant/Pages/default.aspx>

“How it works: funding New Mexico’s fire departments”. (2022). *New Mexico State Fire Marshal*

Ismail et al. (2023). “Going With the Flow: State-to-State Migration”. *United States Census Bureau*. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/06/state-to-state-migration.html#:~:text=and%20Brian%20McKenzie-,More%20people%20moved%20across%20state%20lines%20in%202021%20than%20in,almost%207.4%20million%20in%202019.>

Kentucky Revised Statutes § 95A.250

Kentucky Revised Statutes § 136.392

“Low Interest Loans” (2023). *Kentucky Fire Commission*.  
[https://kyfirecommission.kctcs.edu/fire\\_commission\\_programs/low\\_interest\\_loans.aspx](https://kyfirecommission.kctcs.edu/fire_commission_programs/low_interest_loans.aspx)

New Mexico Administrative Code § 7.27.4

New Mexico Statutes § 59A-6-1.2

New Mexico Statutes § 59A-53-4

NFPA 1710, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments. (n.d.). *National Fire Protection Association*. <https://www.nfpa.org/codes-and-standards/all-codes-and-standards/list-of-codes-and-standards/detail?code=1710>

NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments. (n.d.). *National Fire Protection Association*. <https://www.nfpa.org/codes-and-standards/all-codes-and-standards/list-of-codes-and-standards/detail?code=1720>

North Carolina General Statute § 105-228.5

North Dakota Century Code § 26.1-03-17

“Staffing For Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)”. (2023). *Federal Emergency Management Agency*. <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/safer>

“Staffing Standards for Sheriff’s Offices”. (2012). *Virginia Compensation Board and the Virginia Sheriff’s Association*. <https://www.scb.virginia.gov/docs/fy19staffstd307.pdf>

“State Aid to Localities with Police Departments (599)”. (2023). *Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services*. <https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/law-enforcement/grants/state-aid-localities-police-departments-599>

“Virginia Fire Loss and Fire Department Profile”. (2023). *Federal Emergency Management Agency*. <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/states/virginia.html>

“2023-2024 Executive Budget of Pennsylvania”. (2023). *Pennsylvania Office of the Governor*. <https://www.budget.pa.gov/Publications%20and%20Reports/CommonwealthBudget/Documents/2023-24%20Budget%20Documents/Budget%20Book%202023-24%20WEB%20V.5.04182023.pdf>

## **APPENDIX**

- A. HB 2175 Legislation
- B. Letter from the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security to Localities
- C. Letter from the Executive Director of the Department of Fire Programs to Stakeholders

## APPENDIX A

### VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY – 2023 SESSION

#### CHAPTER 199

*An Act to direct the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security to establish a work group to study existing fire service needs, analyze sustainability of current funding, and review alternative funding models from other states; report.*

[H 2175]

Approved March 22, 2023

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1.** *§ 1. That the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security (the Secretary) shall establish a work group composed of representatives from the Department of Fire Programs, the Department of Planning and Budget, the Office of Emergency Medical Services, the Virginia Fire Services Council, Virginia's Regional EMS Councils, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations, the House Committee on Appropriations, and such other stakeholders as the Secretary deems appropriate to study existing fire service needs, analyze sustainability of current funding, and review alternative funding models from other states. In conducting its study, the work group may hire an outside consultant and shall create a needs assessment survey that analyzes existing fire service needs, the sustainability of current funding, any gaps in current funding, how other states fund fire and EMS services, and best practices from other states. The Secretary shall report the work group's findings and any recommendations to the Chairmen of the House Committee on General Laws and the Senate Committee on General Laws and Technology on or before October 1, 2023.*

## APPENDIX B



### COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Terrance Cole  
Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security

June 5, 2023

Dear Local Government Leader,

The Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security was tasked by legislation with convening a workgroup to offer possible recommendations for fire and EMS in the Commonwealth of Virginia. A component of this requirement is to survey fire service funding and needs from localities.

The Department of Fire Programs, an agency of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, has been delegated with collecting this information. Attached to this letter is a survey asking questions concerning your localities' fire and EMS funding. We ask that you answer these questions and provide any other relevant information as we endeavor to serve better and protect the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the process, don't hesitate to contact Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager at the Department of Fire Programs, via the contact information listed below.

Spencer Willett  
Government Affairs Manager  
(804) 249-1966  
[Spencer.Willett@vdfp.virginia.gov](mailto:Spencer.Willett@vdfp.virginia.gov)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Cole".

Terrance Cole  
Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security

CC: Sonny Daniels, Assistant Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security  
Brad Creasy, Executive Director, VDFP  
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager, VDFP

Patrick Henry Building • 1111 East Broad • Richmond, Virginia 23219  
(804) 786-2211 • TTY (800)828-1120  
[www.governor.virginia.gov](http://www.governor.virginia.gov)

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

APPENDIX C



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

L. Brad Creasy  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Virginia Department of Fire Programs

Nicholas Nanna  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

June 9, 2023

**SUBJECT:** HB 2175 Workgroup Update

Dear fellow firefighters and EMS providers,

The Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security was tasked by legislation from the Virginia General Assembly with convening a workgroup to produce recommendations for fire and EMS in the Commonwealth of Virginia. A component of this requirement is to survey the Commonwealth's fire service to determine current needs in each locality.

The Department of Fire Programs, an agency of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, has been tasked with managing this workgroup. The workgroup referenced above consists of over twenty members representing state government, volunteer firefighters, career firefighters, and EMS providers from across the Commonwealth.

Over the past month this workgroup has met to formulate questions that all localities will receive on June 9th. This survey asks important questions about your fire and EMS capabilities. The intent of this survey is to gain needed information to accurately gauge your locality's needs. I strongly encourage you to reach out to your county administrator, city or town manager, or local official completing this survey to assist them with its completion. Issues with this process should be communicated to the Department of Fire Programs. As the Executive Director of VDFP, I stand committed to ensuring that all components, both volunteer and career, of Virginia's fire and EMS service are reflected in the final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Creasy".

Brad Creasy, Executive Director

CC: Office of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security  
HB 2175 Workgroup Members

Virginia Department of Fire Programs  
1005 Technology Park Drive, Glen Allen, VA 23059-4500  
Phone: (804) 371-0220 or Fax: (804) 371-3444  
[www.vafire.com](http://www.vafire.com)

The foregoing is a recommendation of the HB 2175 Workgroup convened by the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security.