



TUSCOLA JUNIOR MIA HAUSMANN (background) completes the handoff to Kenna Clodfelder in the 800-meter relay. The Lady Warriors finished fourth in the event and earned medals. Photo by Daniel L. Chamness.

Bill would provide \$500 tax credit to volunteer firefighters and EMS workers

By GRACE KINNICUTT
 Capitol News Illinois
 gkinnicutt@capitolnewsillinois.com
 SPRINGFIELD – Members of the Illinois Firefighters Association joined state legislators at

a news conference Wednesday to outline a measure that they claim would recruit more long-term volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel by offering them a tax credit.

Senate Bill 3027 would provide a \$500 tax credit to those who serve as volunteer firefighters or EMS personnel. To qualify for the tax credit, volunteers must work for a fire

department or fire protection district for at least nine months and not receive more than \$10,000 in compensation for those services during the taxable year.

Sen. Christopher Belt, D-Swansea, chief sponsor of the bill, said offering the tax credit would help address the shortage of firefighter and EMS personnel at departments that rely on volunteers.

“These individuals give up their personal time that could be spent with their families to ensure the well-being of our state’s residents with no monetary incentive,” Belt said.

The bill states that if the tax credit exceeds the tax liability for the year, the excess can be applied to the earliest tax year in which there is a tax liability. The credit will not reduce a taxpayer’s liability to less than zero.

During a news conference March 18, Belt noted that if the bill is approved, it would cost about \$20 million to \$22 million in lost revenue to implement it. Belt said the cost upfront pales in comparison to the lives lost without volunteer firefighters and EMS workers.

Margaret Vaughn, govern-

ment affairs director at the Illinois Firefighters Association, said the number of emergency calls to fire departments has tripled over the past 20 years, with most calls being for EMS, while the number of volunteer emergency workers continues to decrease.

Vaughn told the story of a fire at a 100-unit apartment dwelling in Silvis, a blaze that, according to National Fire Protection Association standards, should have had 30 firefighters facing it. But only five firefighters showed up.

“That is a public safety crisis,” Vaughn said.

Vaughn said the aging population, additional training requirements and new policies have been contributing factors in the plummeting number of emergency workers. Training requirements vary by the fire department and district, she said.

National Fire Protection Association standard 1710 sets the minimum requirements for the number of firefighters needed when deploying fire suppression operations, EMS operations and other operations. NFPA standard 1720 establishes the minimum number of volunteers needed

to assist professional firefighters.

Rep. Tom Bennett, R-Gibson City, said passing the measure would help address staffing issues in rural areas that cannot afford full-time firefighters. He noted that the incentive can attract new volunteers to keep communities safe while showing appreciation for their service.

“They don’t do it for the money (or) do it for the glory,” Bennett said. “They do it because they are committed to their communities, their neighbors and their families and they want to help.”

The measure passed the Senate unanimously but awaits further consideration in the House. The House Revenue and Finance Committee is expected to discuss uncertainty as to how the tax credit would be implemented Thursday morning.

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