



WISCONSIN TOWNS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Town Officials

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For Immediate Release
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The Wisconsin Towns Association Applauds BRAVE authors

The WTA thanks Senators Testin and Nass and Representatives Mursau and Pronschinske for co-authoring BRAVE – **B**eginning **R**etention and **A**traction for **V**olunteer **E**mergency personnel. This bill makes great strides toward addressing the volunteer attraction and retention issues increasingly affecting Wisconsin’s towns and citizens by creating refundable tax credits for service provision, education, personal equipment purchases and mileage to educational programs.

“Volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel are hometown heroes that run toward danger in order to keep others safe,” said Mike Koles, WTA Executive Director. “These brave women and men selflessly and heroically serve, often leaving family events to respond to fires, accidents, natural disasters, and health emergencies.”

Wisconsin relies heavily on volunteer emergency personnel. As was noted by Senator Testin during a recent press conference, out of 863 fire departments, 701 rely solely on volunteers and 100 are staffed by a mix of volunteer and career firefighters. Jamie Stephenson, Service Director for Albany Area EMS noted, “almost 80% of EMS care is provided by volunteers in Wisconsin”.

Nate Melby, Town of Campbell Fire Chief, concluded that Wisconsin’s heavy reliance on volunteers relative to the rest of the country makes the 16% decrease in volunteer firefighters nationwide since 2005 especially troubling. He lauded the legislators’ efforts and begged the question, “What would happen if we needed people and we couldn’t staff those departments? What would happen if we had a call and no one came? With this bill, we won’t have this issue.”

WTA President Lee Engelbrecht asked legislators to act quickly on BRAVE legislation. “Given the recent revenue news and bipartisan agreement to cut taxes, what better way to address multiple needs with a single strategy - targeting tax cuts to our hometown heroes while also enhancing public safety and avoiding the higher costs of losing the volunteer system?”

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