

# AN UPDATE ON STATE ISSUES REGARDING OUR FIRST RESPONDERS



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## Local emergency responders receive state grants

Eighteen fire and ambulance companies in the 72<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District received more than \$214,000 from the Pennsylvania Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance Service Grant Program in 2015.

Funded from gaming revenue, 2,507 grants were awarded statewide, totaling \$30 million.

“Donations are a big funding source for most of these companies, so this state funding is an added bonus,” state Rep. Frank Burns said. “People rely on these companies and the volunteers when seconds count and this money will help them continue to provide these valuable services.”

Dear Friend,

I want to offer a big “thank you” to all the firefighters and first responders who willingly put their lives at risk to help others. All too often, we, the general public, take for granted the seriousness and critical nature of your work and you do this while placing yourself in harm’s way. This newsletter is meant to highlight state issues that may impact our emergency responders.

### The following first responder groups received state grants in 2015:

Ashville Fire Co.	Ashville	Fire Company	\$14,285
Cambria Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Colver	Fire Company	\$14,008
Carrolltown Fire Co.	Carrolltown	Fire Company	\$12,069
Cresson Area Ambulance Service Inc.	Cresson	EMS	\$14,885
Dauntless Fire Co.	Ebensburg	Fire Company	\$14,285
East Taylor Volunteer Fire Co.	Johnstown	Fire Company	\$14,008
Ebensburg Area Ambulance Assn.	Ebensburg	EMS	\$7,445
Gallitzin Fire Co. No. 1	Gallitzin	Fire Company	\$14,008
Jackson Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Mineral Point	Fire Company	\$14,285
Jackson Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Mineral Point	EMS	\$7,445
John Carroll Area Ambulance Service	Carrolltown	EMS	\$7,445
Loretto Fire Co.	Loretto	Fire Company	\$12,623
Lower Yoder Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Johnstown	Fire Company	\$11,515
Middle Taylor Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Johnstown	Fire Company	\$14,285
Patton Area Ambulance Association Inc.	Patton	EMS	\$7,445
Patton Fire Co. No. 1	Patton	Fire Company	\$14,285
Portage Area Ambulance Association	Portage	EMS	\$7,445
Portage Volunteer Fire Co.	Portage	Fire Company	\$14,285
Reade Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Blandburg	Fire Company	\$11,515
Revloc Volunteer Fire Co.	Revloc	Fire Company	\$14,285
Summerhill Borough Volunteer Fire Co.	Summerhill	Fire Company	\$13,453
Summerhill Township Volunteer Fire Co.	Beaverdale	Fire Company	\$14,285
Westwood Volunteer Fire Co.	Johnstown	Fire Company	\$14,285

Grants can be used toward repairing, building or renovating facilities. Grant money also can be applied toward the purchase of new equipment, training and certification of staff, or it may go to repay debt related to equipment purchases or facility building and maintenance.

Rep. Burns in 2012 supported changes to the program, which included an extension through June 30, 2016, and a \$5 million increase in its annual budget. As a result, on average, fire companies and ambulance services now received a roughly 25-percent larger grant – ranging from \$9,500 to \$12,000 for fire departments and from \$4,500 to \$5,600 for volunteer ambulance companies.



Rep. Burns (right) helps remove the roof of a car during a training exercise at the Cambria County Fire School.

*Here is a summary of recently passed legislation and bills currently moving through the legislature that may affect first responders.*



## **Act 84 of 2015**

**Signed into law Dec. 20.**

Extends the Children's Health Insurance Program, CHIP, through December 2017.

The new law also allows all non-network EMS providers dispatched through an emergency response system to receive reimbursement directly from the patient's insurance carrier if the provider agrees.

Electing to receive reimbursements directly from the insurer guarantees that our EMS companies receive their payments in a timely manner.

Additionally, if the EMS provider participates in the direct payment process with a particular insurer, the patient is only liable for copayments, coinsurance or deductibles as outlined in their policy.

This new law guarantees timely payments to EMS providers, while also protecting patients from balance billing that can lead to unexpected costs.

## **Act 61 of 2015**

**Signed into law Nov. 4.**

Updated existing law to recognize electric cooperative and utility personnel as emergency responders during declared disasters.

These utility workers shall be considered emergency service responders for the first 72 hours of a declared emergency, or the expiration of the declared emergency, whichever is later.

## **H.B. 1617**

This bill would increase penalties for any injuries or deaths that result from the act of "swatting," or faking the originating position of a fraudulent 9-1-1 call to draw a SWAT team or other emergency personnel. The bill would also allow courts to order the originator to repay actual costs of the faked call.

This bill is under consideration in the House Judiciary Committee.

## **H.B. 397**

This bill that would guarantee that EMS volunteers are covered under workers' compensation rules. This change would provide coverage already given to volunteer firefighters injured while performing their duties.

The bill is under consideration in the House Labor and Industry Committee.

## **H.B. 979**

This bill that would allow a voter referendum directing up to \$10 million of previously approved money for volunteer fire and EMS units to be used as loans for funding equipment purchases.

This would allow our emergency responders to purchase new, needed equipment or update their facilities.

This bill is under consideration in the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee.



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*Rep. Burns presents a legislative citation recognizing the Cambria County Fire School. With Burns is Stephen Unger, past president and former secretary of the Cambria County and Vicinity Volunteer Firemen's Association, and Dean Smith, long-time chief of the Patton Volunteer Fire Department and past president of the county association.*

## **S.B. 267**

This bill would include EMTs and paramedics in the definition of a firefighter under the Heart and Lung Act. This would ensure that all first responders in a department are treated equally. Philadelphia is currently considering a way to prevent paramedics from receiving benefits under the Heart and Lung Act. This bill would protect them from that potential change.

This bill is under consideration in the Senate Labor and Industry Committee.

## **S.B. 986**

This bill would offer civil liability immunity for a person acting as a Good Samaritan who breaks a window or otherwise damages a vehicle in an effort to save an unattended child who may be locked inside a hot vehicle and in danger of heatstroke or death.

The Senate unanimously passed this bill in December. It is under consideration in the House Judiciary Committee.

## **S.B. 136**

This bill would permit a driver of a responding emergency vehicle to leave the scene of an accident under certain conditions without penalty.

The driver would be allowed to continue to travel in the vehicle to respond to the initial emergency or to continue to transport a victim from the initial emergency, as long as there is either a person acting on the driver's behalf remaining at the accident scene or the driver is in radio communication with responders called to or at the secondary accident location.

This bill is under consideration in the Senate Transportation Committee.

## **H.B. 422**

This bill would authorize volunteer stand-alone quick response services, such as river rescue squads, to be eligible to receive grants under the current state Fire and EMS Grant Program.

This bill is under consideration in the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

*Pennsylvania has approximately 2,400 fire companies, the most such departments in the nation.*



*Rep. Burns just didn't tour the Cambria County Fire School; he suited up to participate in controlled-burn and vehicle-rescue training sessions, so he could experience firsthand what firefighters must go through. He credits this experience with giving him valuable insight into the challenges these first responders face every day.*



# Background checks required for those who work with junior firefighters

I wanted to remind you that a new state law requires background checks for volunteers and employees who work with children. This includes those who work with junior firefighters and other junior first responders.

EMS-specific information on the state's background check law is available online at the Office of the State Fire Commissioner: [www.osfc.pa.gov](http://www.osfc.pa.gov) under the items of interest.

If you are a new, approved volunteer and starting your assignment, you must have your clearances before you begin. If you have already been approved and have been acting as a volunteer, you must have the clearance before July 1.

Volunteers and employees who work with children need up to three separate background checks:

- **Pennsylvania State Police criminal report.**  
The police report can be ordered online at <https://epatch.state.pa.us>.
- **Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services.**  
To order the Child Abuse History Clearance, you need to create an account through the Department of Human Services at <http://bit.ly/1GIVJZf>.
- **An FBI criminal history report is also required if:**  
The volunteer position is paid and the volunteer has lived outside of Pennsylvania sometime during the previous 10 years. That report can be ordered at [https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index\\_dpw.htm](https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index_dpw.htm).



*Rep. Burns is a tireless supporter of firefighters and EMS personnel, as he recognizes the important but often dangerous work they perform every day.*

The clearances must then be renewed every five years.

State background check fees have been waived for volunteers. Those whose employment requires the checks also had their state fees reduced from \$10 to \$8. Unfortunately, the state has no control over the cost of the FBI background check, which is currently \$27.50. If your department is a paid department, any paid staff who have oversight of children must purchase their background checks.

More information is available at the website [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov).

***State Sen. Stewart Greenleaf has introduced a series of three bills that would assist first responders and their families in pursuit of higher education. The three bills are all currently under consideration in the Senate Education Committee. The three bills are:***

## **S.B. 25**

This bill would expand the Police Officer, Firefighter, Correction Employee and National Guard Member Child Beneficiary Educational Program to include surviving spouses.

Children of those deceased first responders are entitled to free college educations. This would offer the same educational possibility to spouses of the deceased.

## **S.B. 26**

This bill would establish a tuition credit program of up to \$600 for a volunteer or family member who attends a community college.

A volunteer must agree to serve the emergency response team for a minimum of four years. The student covered under the program would need to maintain a "C" average to extend coverage for a maximum of four years.

## **S.B. 27**

This bill would offer educational assistance grants and student loan forgiveness for volunteer emergency service personnel.

Annual educational grants of up to \$3,700 would be available to Pennsylvania residents enrolled in approved courses at approved educational institutions who have been a volunteer in good standing for over a year.

PHEAA educational loan forgiveness would also be available for qualified volunteers, with a maximum forgiveness of \$2,000 per year up to \$10,000 over five years.

