

“What strategies should legislators consider to address the dilemma of increasing town/village fire and emergency medical costs?”

In recent years, it has been painfully apparent that budget cuts are happening everywhere, and rural areas in particular are seeing many of these unfortunate cuts. More specifically, increasing emergency medical costs in rural areas is causing a dilemma for legislators statewide. Funding for these emergency services is a public policy issue that can quite literally mean life or death, so it is imperative that this issue is addressed immediately. When legislators are deciding how to combat increasing fire and emergency medical costs, they should consider strategies such as raising taxes, municipal partnerships, and local fundraising.

One strategy that legislators could consider, and possibly the most unpopular, would be raising taxes. These include property, sales, local income, special, and property transfer taxes. Local property taxes are nationally the most common in supporting fire and EMS services, and they are typically levied at a set rate per dollar of assessed property value.

Local sales taxes could also be a major source of funding, as these taxes contribute to general revenues that support fire and emergency services.

For example, a \$.005 sales tax was approved by the community of Lepato, Arkansas, and it is to be used solely to assist the Lepato Volunteer Fire Department. This tax is to be in place for five years, and its restricted time frame is possibly what has made it so successful; in the first half of the five years, the department was able to purchase a new fire engine, which is almost completely paid off, and they predict that additional revenue in the second half of the five years will help fund other necessary purchases.

Public and private partnerships could be another strategy for legislators to consider. By combining resources and cost sharing, the issue of rising fire and emergency medical costs may be more easily

overcome. Forming alliances can help mitigate budget problems, and collaborating efforts with neighboring municipalities would allow for excellent service at a lower cost. These partnerships could also be beneficial in the sense that working with another municipality would provide more equipment and personnel for each community served.

Lastly, a fairly simple strategy that legislators can consider to deal with these increasing costs is local fundraising. I never doubt that small communities can conquer big issues such as this; I come from a rural area myself, and I have seen firsthand the way my community can come together and raise substantial amounts of money to support any worthy cause. Fire and EMS departments can raise money by selling products, such as calendars, and services, like car washes and rental facilities.

Additionally, hosting a fun event like a barbecue, carnival, or casino night is another great way to gather the community together and raise funds.

In conclusion, legislators should consider raising taxes, municipal partnerships, and local fundraising when making decisions regarding increasing fire and emergency medical costs. This issue is one that has a direct effect on everyone in the township, village, or community, and it can play a huge role in many life or death situations, so its importance is undeniable. Discussion and creative ideas are essential to find innovative ways to combat these rising costs; I have seen how communities can come together to solve issues like this, and I am confident that, through cooperative efforts, we can find a solution to this problem.

## Works Cited

"Funding Alternatives for Fire and Emergency Services." *Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Fire Administration.*

Web. 27 May. 2016.

"Updated 2013-14 Wisconsin Statutes and Annotations." *Wisconsin State Legislature.* 10 May. 2016. Web. 27 May. 2016.