

2016 Wisconsin Towns Association Scholarship Competition

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

There is no doubt in anyone’s mind that the services of fire and emergency medical response are absolutely vital. They are necessary and should be offered to all citizens unconditionally. However, the process of keeping these services effective and available is very costly. For smaller municipalities these funds can be extremely hard to come by. Some ideas that legislators could consider implementing to obtain funds include requiring permits for potentially hazardous risks, being wise with equipment purchases, and creating more labor alternatives to full time employment.

One way to help off-set the cost of emergency service is to preventatively charge a small fee for high-risk behaviors. For example, because “smoking is the leading cause of residential and total fire deaths in all eight countries with available statistics” in a study published by the US National Library of Medicine, it seems fair that at least a small portion of the taxes already being paid during cigarette purchases could be earmarked for fire service providers. Additionally, permits could be required for having a fire pit in one’s yard. Doing this would not only generate funds, but could also help citizens think twice before starting an unsafe fire on their property. These are a few ways in which money could be collected to help reduce the burden of emergency costs.

Aside from obtaining more money, service providers could look into ways of reducing spending. One way to do this is to only replace equipment when it is necessary. Obviously as technology increases, equipment should be kept up-to-date and efficient; however if the item

does not truly need to be replaced, funds should be conserved. In a similar mindset if old equipment can be sold when the town or village officials are done with it, that could be profitable. "Some departments have raised revenues by selling used equipment and apparatus to other agencies or to collectors," ("Funding" 44). This method can help pay for new equipment that can be extremely costly.

The other area these departments spend huge sums of money on is wages. One way, particularly for smaller towns, to try to reduce this is to operate many employees on a "volunteer" basis. This offers many options and can be adjusted to fit the village or town individually. In some cases service men and women may be asked to provide their own transportation to an emergency scene. Other times this may include only working when needed so wages are not being distributed while employees are not active. In all varying degrees of flexibility, these volunteer employees can lead to drastic reductions in spending. Many of these volunteers will work for only a small stipend. This can create great savings when compared to the median salary of a firefighter of \$45,970 (33-2011 Firefighters). Also, towns may choose to partner up with other local areas. This helps keep the needed number of full-time employees low while still providing adequate emergency coverage. By using different labor alternatives departments can see a reduction in cost.

Providing these important services to all may be extremely expensive, but it is also extremely necessary. Because of this demand, it is vital that small towns look into addressing these hefty costs. Methods that can help diminish this concern include preventative payment for risky behavior, supplementing equipment spending, and alternative labor options.

Works Cited

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