

HF 2077 – Chief Author John Huot

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HF 2077. I submit my thoughts as someone who has concerns the transfer of the firefighter certification program from its existing non-profit status to a unit of state government.

Background:

The Minnesota Fire Service Certification Board (MFSCB) has been certifying firefighters in Minnesota since 1988. The MFSCB provides the only third party internationally accredited certification entity administrating examinations for over 35 +/- different levels of certifications based on NFPA Standards for Professional Qualification of fire service personnel in Minnesota. The third party examination process is a program that examines and validates competencies of Minnesota' fire service absent of influences from training institutions, and local entities.

International accreditation through the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress was awarded in 1998 and through the ProBoard in 2008. The MFSCB has been registered as a non-profit organization with the Secretary of State since the early 1990s. The program is very successful and completely voluntary.

The MFSCB is in the process of looking for a new Executive Director to assume day to day management as of January 1, 2024. A Request for Proposal was developed and made available. The RFP was/is designed to be solicited to interested individuals or organizations. The Dept. of Public Safety (DPS) has expressed interest in assuming these duties. If DPS were to be awarded this position, legislation would have to be crafted and signed into law. The MFSCB provided the DPS with a copy of the RFP, as well as a list of requests/concerns that had to be met to gain MFSCB support.

The following is a list of policy issues related to HF 2077:

- 1.) Although the MFSCB has provided limited input into the final document referred to as HF 2077/SF 1932, the entire MFSCB has not had an opportunity to see or comment on the final draft of this bill prior to its introduction. The DPS had assured the MFSCB that the final draft of the bill would be shared for MFSCB approval prior to its introduction. This proposal is NOT a MFSCB initiative.
- 2.) Minnesota's fire service has not seen this document. This proposal has had very little exposure to the over 20,000 firefighters that serve the state. Only a handful of firefighters have even heard about this proposal. The movement of this major function to state government should not happen without input from the entirety of Minnesota's fire service.
- 3.) The makeup of this Advisory Board allows for 5 members to come from regional fire associations of Greater Minnesota. Currently, the regional fire associations enjoy 15 seats on the MFSCB, one appointed from each of the state's 15 active regional fire associations. As this bill has been crafted, the MFSCB has vehemently opposed the proposed reduction in rural fire association representation. With approximately 75% of the state's fire service population, being from

Greater Minnesota, participating in the certification program, there is considerable concern that Greater Minnesota will lose its voice in the program.

- 4.) Firefighter certification is the foundation of Minnesota's career firefighter licensure program, and widely and actively accepted by paid on-call and volunteer fire departments. If the program were to move to the state, the transition needs to be seamless as it would occur in the middle of the testing season. DPS has not provided a comprehensive plan/proposal as to the operational plan, transition plan, or estimated operational budget of their proposal. This would be a major change in the business of the training and certifying of firefighters in Minnesota. The fire service should have an opportunity to view anticipated budget projections relating to testing and recertification costs prior to the proposal be written into law.
- 5.) The career, paid on-call, and volunteer fire service rely heavily on the present certification system. Minnesota's certification system has grown from a handful of participants to over 36,000 current and past fire fighters.

Would moving this operation away from non-profit status to state government be good public policy? The current non-profit certification model in Minnesota is seen and recognized as one of the leading programs within the IFSAC and ProBoard system. There is grave concern that changing the structural model from a non-profit to a state government function would eliminate much of the efficiency and passion that has been the driving force that has positioned the MFSCB in a strong position within Minnesota's fire service community.

Again, I would ask that committee members oppose HF 2077. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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