

The Virginia State Firefighters Association (VSFA) supports House Bill 123. Our members believe that this legislation, when enacted, will create a deterrent to injuring, destroying, removing, or tampering with any firefighting equipment or apparatus, emergency medical services vehicle – a real-world problem we encounter. This equipment and apparatus constitute critical resources to the communities we protect and if damaged or stolen, cannot easily be repaired, or replaced. The funds required to make repairs or to replace damaged or stolen items offset funds that would be used to respond to emergencies, reducing our capabilities. These incidents require our members to re-direct precious resources at a time when fundraising mechanisms are hindered by the pandemic National Emergency, when supply chain challenges are delaying the manufacture and delivery of new apparatus and equipment to replace obsolete or end-of-lifecycle equipment and apparatus, and when the availability of parts to repair damaged or broken equipment and apparatus has been reduced due to staffing challenges at our suppliers' businesses.

Among the impacts that the acts this bill targets can have include:

- **Creating personal risk for our firefighters and emergency medical care providers:** During 2020, an incident in a nearby jurisdiction illustrates the risks our personnel face when others want to take our equipment. A ladder truck answered a call to investigate a broken water pipe in a building late at night, flooding the floors below. While the crew was inside sizing up the resources that they needed, their driver outside was approached by an armed man who demanded he surrender a very specific type of forcible entry equipment that firefighters use to get into locked buildings to make rescues and fight fires. The driver offered a simple pry bar rather than this more specific hydraulic tool, and the would-be robber left unsatisfied. It was a brazen act; what if the would-be robber had been more aggressive in his demand? A lone firefighter outside a piece of apparatus late at night likely would have little to no chance of either successfully fleeing or fighting against an armed suspect.
- **Creating financial risk for affected departments:** One recent incident in Northern Virginia found a fire engine taken from a repair center was joyridden to Page County before an alert police officer brought that to a halt. Thankfully, there was no damage incurred, but what if that had ended in a crash? Insurance may cover actual value of a lost or damaged vehicle, but this sort of apparatus runs about \$750,000 today. No fire department has that sort of funding available for a quick turn to obtain a replacement. In my own fire department, our efforts to replace a high-mileage ambulance have been hindered by the manufacturer's inability to secure a truck chassis as the electronic chips necessary to the function of the unit are unavailable due to a worldwide shortage. That delay has pushed our project almost a year, and our dealer has advised us to order another truck chassis now in order to address an anticipated replacement of another ambulance during early 2023. That may be practical advice, but it is a stretch to think that most departments can order units two-at-a-time and remain fiscally sound.
- **Creating community risk by the absence of resources:** When your local fire department orders a new fire engine, the timeline between signing the contract and delivery is usually a year. Rural departments in particular cannot afford to wait a year to take delivery on a piece of apparatus that they had to purchase under duress due to damage or theft – and fire apparatus and ambulances can and will be stolen. Waiting up to a year to restore a high-value and critical asset like a fire engine presents unacceptable risk to the communities we serve. Expecting a

community to do without an ambulance for an extended period of time is imprudent and will have unwanted consequences.

In all of these instances, lives and property are at stake. We believe this bill will help serve as a deterrent to those who would place our fire and rescue service personnel, our organizations, and our communities at risk through irresponsible or outright criminal acts and would implement real consequences for those who would disregard those deterrent measures. The VSFA supports passage of HB 123. Thank you for the opportunity to make our position known.

Respectfully submitted,

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