

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 1279

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

---

Hearing Date: April 19, 2021 10:00 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

---

VERNON DAVIS

LIMESTONE COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT #2

Groesbeck, TX

HB 1279

"The constitutional amendment to authorize a local option exemption from ad valorem taxation of a percentage, not to exceed five percent, of the appraised value of the residence homesteads of certain volunteer first responders."

As a Commissioner of Emergency Services District # 2, and as a resident of Limestone County and the state of Texas, I wholeheartedly support this bill.

The life blood of the rural fire department is the volunteer. Of the 1 million+ fire fighters in the U.S. over 800,000 are volunteers. The number 1 issue in a volunteer fire department is recruitment and retention, and this problem is prevalent not only in Limestone County but across the nation. Over the last 3 decades the number of volunteer firefighters has dropped over 10- 12 %, yet the demand for their service has increased. Several fire departments in Limestone County have less than 6 members, I would submit that many Texas counties face this dilemma. My relationship and interaction with our local volunteer fire department has made me painfully aware that we must face the reality that volunteer fire departments are "going up in smoke".

In an attempt to combat this issue, county and fire department leaders must develop a comprehensive incentive package; a package that includes a viable monetary element.

It is irrefutable that volunteer fire fighters contribute significantly to the financial welfare of a community. On average a volunteer fire fighter donates services worth more than \$18,000 to their respective community annually. The NFPA estimates the value of service provided by volunteer fire fighters in the U.S. is nearly 140 billion dollars annually.

Since February of last year and the development of the Corona virus, we have called upon our volunteer first responders at an unprecedented rate. With every call, volunteer fire fighters and medical response staff ignore the ramifications of exposure to the virus, and repeatedly put themselves at risk in way that is tantamount to going in a burning building. The "new normal" requires them to compromise their safety and even their lives more than ever, yet they continue to perform selflessly and without hesitation.

Some states that already have a comprehensive incentive package; a package that includes a property tax credit are: Pennsylvania, New York, Louisiana, Delaware, Iowa, South Carolina, Nebraska, Alaska, and Connecticut.

In an effort to preserve this valuable resource the citizens and leaders of Texas should justifiably arm our counties and our volunteer fire department leaders with the ability to include a monetary component to their incentive package, clearly, by passing HB 1279.