



Representative McLawhorn's News from Raleigh

November 7, 2007

We rely on first responders to help us with everyday problems and protect us during emergencies and disasters. They are often on the frontline and risk their lives to keep us safe. My colleagues and I are thankful for all of the sacrifices our first responders and their families make for all of us as they serve. This session we made several improvements to help our police, sheriffs, firefighters, EMS personnel and other first responders.

As always, thank you for your continued support. Please contact me if I can help with any questions or concerns you have.

Budget

> Our budget contained several items that will benefit first responders. The General Assembly set aside \$250,000 for training and equipment for seven HAZMAT Regional Response Teams. More than \$364,500 will be used to expand the State Fire Marshal's staff. We will spend \$293,500 to increase the benefits in the Fireman's and Rescue Squad Worker's Pension Fund from \$165 to \$167 per month for retirees and we added a \$250 tax credit for volunteer firefighters. The Office of Emergency Medical Services will receive a \$101,800 from a grant from the Duke Endowment to establish two new positions that will help improve EMS in North Carolina.

Hazardous Waste

> The General Assembly passed a bill that will protect residents who live close to hazardous waste facilities and help first responders serving in those areas. The bill (HB 36) requires owners of hazardous waste facilities to send critical information to all emergency response agencies serving the area in which the facility is located at least 120 days before applying for a permit. This includes information on the locations and properties of hazardous waste within the facility and what the facility expects each emergency response agency to do in the event of an emergency. The emergency response agencies must then tell the owners if they are equipped to effectively meet those expectations and if the facility has adequate plans to handle emergencies.

Anyone who applies for a permit to open a hazardous waste facility must notify every person who lives or owns property within a quarter of a mile of the facility that there is an application on file within 10 days. Businesses that have received a permit must give residents a description of the facility, the hazardous waste processed there, and the emergency response plan for the facility once a year. The owners or operators of a hazardous waste facility also must provide 24 hour security and surveillance of the facility seven days a week.

The bill also establishes a task force that will allow state and local fire inspectors to identify risks associated with hazardous materials.

If hazardous material is released and State Medical Assistance Teams or the Epidemiology Section of the Department of Health and Human Services is activated, the business that is responsible for the release is liable for costs incurred by the personnel that respond to the incident.

Immigration

> The NC Sheriff's Association will receive \$750,000 to better coordinate their efforts with those of the U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement office. The new program will enhance communication and cooperation between federal, state, and local officers who then work together to find and deport illegal aliens. This funding will pay for technical training and travel expenses for officers who will take part in the program.

Firefighter Immunity

> My colleagues and I passed a bill (HB 552) that grants local trustees of the Firefighter's Relief Fund immunity from civil liability when they are acting within the scope of their official duties and did not incur the liability from the operation of a motor vehicle.

Firefighter's Relief Fund

> We passed a bill (HB 833) to rename the Firemen's Relief Fund the Firefighter's Relief Fund to recognize all of the female firefighters who risk their lives and serve to protect North Carolinians.

Emergency Vehicles

> Legislators passed a bill (HB 1321) that grants weight and size limit exemptions to state and local firefighting agencies transporting overweight and oversized vehicles (up to 90,000 pounds, 12 feet wide and 75 feet long) being used to respond to forest fires, wildfires, or other emergencies or disasters.

Criminal Background Checks

> The Emergency Medical Service Disciplinary Committee now has the authority to review criminal background information of EMS personnel. A bill (HB 535) authorizes the Committee to use criminal background information to make recommendations involving EMS credentials and disciplinary action.

> Another bill (HB 1322) gives local fire chiefs, county fire marshals and local EMS directors the authority to directly ask the federal Department of Justice for criminal histories of applicants.