

No. 05-25-RE

A RESOLUTION

A Resolution of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania expressing the intent of Council to work in conjunction with the Chief Executive, County Manager, and Department of Emergency Services to provide technical and other assistance to the County's volunteer fire departments' efforts to address their staffing and budgetary challenges, when such assistance is logistically feasible and subject to applicable budgetary constraints.

WHEREAS, in 1730, a fire started on a ship docked in Philadelphia, PA, and spread to a nearby wharf where multiple warehouses and three neighboring houses caught fire; this incident led to Benjamin Franklin's advocacy for a community service to help extinguish fires to protect the public and property; and

WHEREAS, in 1733, Franklin wrote an article in the Pennsylvania Gazette about the need for a society or group of organized citizens to prevent and protect property from fires, and on December 7, 1736 he co-founded the Union Fire Company, the first formally organized all-volunteer fire company in the colonies ; and

WHEREAS, the tradition of volunteer firefighting has continued ever since, and while volunteer fire companies in Pennsylvania are not legally required to report the number of volunteers, reports published in late 2021 estimate that approximately 30,000 of the Commonwealth's 36,000-38,000 firefighters are volunteers; and

WHEREAS, this number marks a profound decrease in the number of volunteer firefighters in the Commonwealth; the National Volunteer Fire Council and PA DCED estimated that there were 360,000 volunteer firefighters in Pennsylvania in 1975; and

WHEREAS, in Allegheny County, volunteer firefighters protect over 910,000 people and save the county an estimated \$60 million dollars a year; there are 203 volunteer fire companies in Allegheny County and the challenge of keeping these companies fully equipped and staffed, well trained, and ready to respond at a moment's notice is one that nearly every fire company in the region addresses on a daily basis; and

WHEREAS, in 2021, current Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner Thomas Cook noted that the current model of volunteer firefighting in Pennsylvania is virtually unchanged since the Union Fire Company was established, and continued: "[w]ith the evolution of society, the volunteer fire service is facing several crises. The financial crisis: the process of selling hoagies no longer generates enough money to buy a vehicle that now costs between \$500,000 and \$1 million. The second crisis — it is no longer looming. I think we're actively engaged — is the staff issues across the board. Volunteerism is down."; and

WHEREAS, attraction/retention of volunteers and fundraising are both complex issues that will require well-considered, innovative actions to address; and

WHEREAS, by way of example, many volunteer fire companies within Allegheny County experience their greatest staffing issues during daylight hours because the vast majority of individuals who volunteer also have jobs that require their attendance at those times; and

WHEREAS, in addition, the inadequacy of traditional fundraising activities referenced by Commissioner Cook results in volunteers having to devote more of their time to fundraising activities, which may lessen the desire to participate for many individuals; and

WHEREAS, Allegheny County has taken some steps in an effort to assist volunteer fire companies with volunteer attraction and retention, perhaps most notably the FireVEST program (which provides full scholarships for an associate's degree or certificate program at CCAC, as well as training at the Allegheny County Fire Academy for individuals who commit to five years of volunteering and meet other technical requirements), the Volunteer Service Tax Credit Program (which provides a credit for County property taxes for eligible volunteer firefighters), and the establishment of a first responders' wellness and respite center in South Park; and

WHEREAS, among many other ways of mitigating staffing and funding challenges faced by volunteer fire companies, consolidation and regionalization are often discussed as methods of pooling both volunteers and financial resources; and

WHEREAS, it is the judgment of Council that Allegheny County, as the operator of the County's 911 call center, is uniquely placed to assist coordination and other efforts undertaken by the County's volunteer fire companies, because the County has access to 911 call data and records that facilitate analysis of regional trends and patterns in the context of fire emergencies; and

WHEREAS, it is further the judgment of Council that the County's Fire Academy serves as a vital training resource for the County's volunteer firefighters, and the utilization of the Fire Academy by numerous volunteer fire departments throughout the County provides an invaluable resource that could be used to foster cooperation among those departments in addressing the challenges that they face; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire and intent of Council to work in conjunction with the Chief Executive, County Manager, and Department of Emergency Services to provide technical and other assistance to the County's volunteer fire departments' efforts to address their staffing and budgetary challenges, when such assistance is logistically feasible and subject to applicable budgetary constraints;

The Council of the County of Allegheny hereby resolves as follows:

SECTION 1. Incorporation of the Preamble.

The provisions set forth in the preamble to this Resolution are incorporated by reference in their entirety herein.

SECTION 2.

The County of Allegheny hereby declares that it intends to work in conjunction with the Chief Executive, County Manager, and Department of Emergency Services to provide technical and other assistance to the County's volunteer fire departments' efforts to address their staffing and budgetary challenges, when such assistance is logistically feasible and subject to applicable budgetary constraints. To this end:

- A. The President of Council is hereby encouraged to establish a working group on volunteer firefighter retention and volunteer fire company funding, to meet periodically and provide guidance to Council regarding supportive initiatives that could be pursued by the County. Such working group should be comprised of relevant representatives of the volunteer firefighters, volunteer fire companies, one or more members of Council, and representatives of the County's administration and Department of Emergency Services;
- B. The Chair of the Council's Committee on Public Safety is hereby encouraged to convene one or a series of meetings to gather information to inform Council's consideration relating to the challenges facing volunteer firefighters and companies; and
- C. The Council hereby commits to facilitating the attendance of one or more members of Council at periodic discussions among the various volunteer firefighters and companies relating to intercompany cooperation, consolidation, regionalization, or other potential arrangements across multiple companies aimed at moderating the staffing and funding crises currently being experienced.

SECTION 3. Severability. *If any provision of this Resolution shall be determined to be unlawful, invalid, void or unenforceable, then that provision shall be considered severable from the remaining provisions of this Resolution which shall be in full force and effect.*

SECTION 4. Repealer. Any Resolution or Ordinance or part thereof conflicting with the provisions of this Resolution is hereby repealed so far as the same affects this Resolution.

PRIMARY SPONSOR(S): COUNCIL MEMBER NACCARATI-CHAPKIS

CO-SPONSOR(S): COUNCIL MEMBER MACEY

Enacted in Council, this 8th day of July, 2025

Council Agenda No. 13579-25


Patrick Catena
President of Council

Attest: 
Jared Barker
Chief Clerk of Council

Chief Executive Office July 16, 2025

Approved: 
Sara Innamorato
County Executive

Attest: 
John J. Jannin