

GAFC FIRESIDE

March, 2011
SPECIAL EDITION

OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN VOLUNTEER AND COMBINATION DEPARTMENTS NEED OUR HELP. .

RIGHT NOW



by: President
David Kimbrell

Fire Service consolidation means a consistent voice.

Make no mistake. The Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs makes good-faith efforts to represent everyone in the Fire Service; career, combination and volunteer departments, as well as investigators, inspectors, educators, EMS personnel, those who provide mutual aid services and a host of others. If any group has taken a hit as a result of the recession and suffered from benign neglect, it has been our volunteer and combination departments. While demands on these departments increase, funding and political support decreases. The Georgia Senate unanimously voted on a consolidation of state offices we work with on a daily basis. The curtailment of services from the Fire Marshal's Office and the Fire Academy has hurt volunteer and combination departments more than any other sector of the Fire Service.

While there are many unanswered questions regarding how a Fire Commissioner would wrestle with some of the biggest issues confronting the Fire Service, we are convinced that the new strength that will result through a unified Fire Service will allow us to make our case in an orderly, professional fashion, this to the right people at the right time.

A few days ago, SB 186 passed in the Senate by a unanimous vote. The bill consolidates three key state department operations under the authority of a new Fire Commissioner. The House will be next for debate and hopefully passage. Regarding the bill, **exactly what constitutes the big picture for the Fire Service?** The simple answer is a consistent Fire Service voice directly to the Governor and other elected officials and legislators. What's wrong with our present voice? **PLENTY.** Based on past experience, it is fair to conclude that our only avenue to solve a myriad of critical and long standing problems is to have a cabinet level position to convey our problems, this on a year 'round, regular basis. Being on the defense over all the years has hurt us. We need regular and consistent communications with influential leaders.

What state operations would be affected by a consolidation? The Fire Marshal's Office, Fire Academy and Standards and Training Office. Theoretically, each is a voice for us; the Fire Marshal for fire prevention, fire safety and code adherence, Standards and Training for promulgation and support of basic standards and the Fire Academy for required and necessary training. So what happens when each of these operations is curtailed by funding or worse, lack of commitment by state and local officials? **NOTHING.**

Here is a perfect example: Volunteer and Combination departments in Georgia exceed 70% of all the state's fire services. Hundreds of speeches, articles and conferences throughout the country have chronicled the plight of these departments. And what has been done? In 2010-2011, funding for all Fire Academy adjunct instructors was eliminated cutting off decentralized training to Volunteer departments. The Forestry Commission was forced to reduce personnel that provided new and reconditioned fire vehicles at greatly reduced costs to rural departments. Local authorities have frozen spending on purchases of firefighting vehicles including the forestry option. The Standards and Training Council Rules Committee made proposals that if passed, will force unfunded mandates for county and local fire jurisdictions. The Fire Marshal's Office has had a series of staff reductions over two years resulting in statewide service delays. **NOW (TODAY or TOMORROW) is the time to communicate with each member of the House who has Volunteer and/or Combination departments. One phone call or fax stating support for the consolidation and importance for at risk fire departments will guarantee passage of this bill. WE NEED TO HELP THOSE DEPARTMENTS. MANY WILL NOT SURVIVE WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM ALL OF US.**

CONTACT INSTRUCTIONS:

One e-mail, phone call or fax stating support for the consolidation of the fire service accomplished through SB186, and expressing to your representative the importance of the bill for at risk fire departments will guarantee passage of this bill.

In terms of how to contact your legislator, the link below allows anyone in Georgia to enter their zip code and it will provide a listing of all the state and national elected officials for their area. One would need to look under “State Legislative” to see who is their State Representative; they can then click on the name of their “Representative” and it will provide contact information including email and phone; there is even another option from the Representative’s page that provides “Complete Contact Information.”

http://www.votesmart.org/official_state_legislator.php?type=office&state_id=GA&criteria=lower

EXAMPLE

To: The Honorable Gerald Greene
District 149

March 21, 2011

From Colquitt-Miller Fire EMS
Chief Craig Tully

RE: Fire Service Consolidation [SB 186]

Representative Greene,

This is to inform you that our department fully supports the efforts of the Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs and the Georgia State Firefighters Association in achieving passage of the Fire Service consolidation bill. We believe the bill will save substantial state funds and result in many government efficiencies. As important, every Volunteer and Combination fire department will benefit from a reorganization of the state fire services listed in the bill.

We ask that you cast your vote in favor of this important measure.

THANKS!

gerald.greene@house.ga.gov