

FIRE CHIEFS PRESS GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE TAX INCENTIVE TO VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

For Immediate Release

OTTAWA, June 17, 2008 – The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs is urging Parliament to give speedy passage to a bill that would give a tax incentive to volunteer emergency workers, including firefighters.

Bill C-219 was introduced earlier this year by Wayne Easter, MP for Malpeque, to provide a tax credit for volunteer firefighters who are not paid but have performed a specific number of hours of service, signed off by their municipality. They would be allowed to deduct \$1000 annually from their taxable income if they performed at least 100 hours of volunteer service - \$2000 if they performed 200 hours or more. The Bill was recently passed by the Standing Committee on Finance and will go to the House of Commons for Third Reading.

Volunteer firefighters protect over 90 percent of Canadian communities

“Canada’s almost 85,000 volunteer firefighters provide protection to over 90 per cent of Canadian communities, most of them rural,” said Fred Kennedy, President of the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services and Fire Chief of the Blackville Fire Department in New Brunswick. Chief Kennedy, a Director of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, noted that a bill to provide tax credits for volunteer firefighters was introduced a few years ago but was rejected by the government, which felt it would open the floodgates to similar demands from other volunteers like coaches of sports leagues, and persons delivering meals to the elderly.

Volunteers prevent drain on municipal budgets

“Volunteerism is a fundamental value in Canada and all such work is very important to our society. However, firefighting is essential to protect lives, homes and businesses. “It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers, as many, especially in smaller communities, are self-employed, causing a negative impact on their businesses whenever they are called out for an emergency. Failure to provide incentives to promote recruitment may force small, cash strapped municipalities to consider the difficult option of reducing fire services,” Chief Kennedy said.

Many volunteers must resort to local fundraising for basic equipment

In the vast majority of volunteer fire departments there is no payment of any kind to volunteer members, and departments often have to rely on local fundraising to equip themselves to even the minimum level.

Volunteers must meet basic firefighting training standards

Volunteer firefighters have to meet, on their own time, all the training demanded by the Firefighter One Standard of the National Fire Protection Association, recognized throughout North America. Volunteer fire departments typically devote one evening per week to training and volunteers are obliged to attend a set percentage of these sessions in order to remain members of the Fire Department. Weekend training sessions are also held.

“Volunteer firefighters are one of the best deals available to Canadian municipalities, and we urge Members of Parliament and the Senate to give speedy passage to Bill C-219,” concluded Chief Kennedy.

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Information

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