



OREGON FIRE DISTRICT
DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

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**Testimony before the House Veterans' Services and
Emergency Preparedness Committee
In Support of HB 2177 & HB 2475
March 21, 2013
Genoa Ingram**

The Oregon Fire District Directors Association (OFDDA) was formed in 1950 and serves the elected public officials of over 200 Fire Protection Districts throughout Oregon, all Special Districts formed under ORS Chapter 478. The five-member governing boards are responsible for the financial and management oversight of the Districts. They serve without compensation.

The OFDDA is the voice for these fire protection districts, most of which are small rural districts operating on an all-volunteer basis or with minimal paid positions, usually an office administrator and/or a Chief. The OFDDA supports volunteer incentives such as those contained in HB 2177 and HB 2475.

Decline in recruitment and retention of volunteers in the fire service has been a problem that has escalated nationwide over the past twenty years and prompted the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to issue a report in 1998 to identify problems and solutions. In the report, a number of incentives such retirement and pension plans (such as the "Length of Service Awards Program" or "LOSAP" currently administered by OFDDA) and direct financial incentives such as low interest housing loans, and tax exemptions and deductions such as those contained in HB 2177 and HB 2475. A follow-up report by the U.S. Fire Administration in 2004 lists similar solutions.

As a taxpayer, I appreciate the fact that in tough economic times, a segment of our population is willing to step up and provide a valuable public safety service. This is particularly important in the smaller rural areas where budgets and resources are particularly lean.

On September 10, 2004, the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) Foundation officially released its Cost Savings Study and Calculator at the National Associations of Towns and Townships Conference in Washington, DC. The study, which was conducted by the Public Safety and Environmental Protection Institute at St. Joseph's University with the assistance of VFIS, found that it would cost U.S. taxpayers \$37.2 billion annually if they had to replace all volunteer firefighters nationwide with career staffing.

The Oregon Fire District Directors Association thanks you for the opportunity to be heard on these important proposals and urges the Committee to act favorably with regard to volunteer incentives.