



Newfoundland and Labrador Association
Of Fire Services



BRIEF

Presented to

The Premier

And

**Government of
Newfoundland and Labrador**

February 15, 2011

By

**Newfoundland and Labrador Association
Of Fire Services**

Our Crest

**The Honorable Premier and
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador**

Honorable Ministers of the Social Policy Committee:

On behalf of the firefighters of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services wishes to thank you for providing us this opportunity to present brief on the condition of the fire services in this province.

Once again, we truly appreciate the interest shown by past Social Policy Committees of Cabinet to the concerns of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services. In the interest of being brief, we will just like to generally state that all support to the province's fire services and to our association is greatly appreciated and it is anticipated that this partnership will continue.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services (NLAFS) is a provincial organization representing more than 6000 firefighters located in almost all municipalities and local service districts in our province. It is the only all-inclusive voice for the fire services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Honorable Ministers, we appear to you once again this year bearing relatively the same message on our priority topic. The resubmission of this request stands testament to the importance of this issue. Our request last year was met with a modest increase in funding levels for fire trucks for the province but fell short to only 50% of where we respectfully asked it be increased as bare minimum.

Our collective focus is formed on the very basic need to provide a very essential service to our population to ensure live securely and safely. Recent events such as Hurricane Igor in Newfoundland and Labrador have highlighted the need for a well equipped and trained fire service. One would ask as to why it still remains that the fire service must continually be reduced to beg for assistance from the very governments that they serve.

In last year's brief to the Social Policy Committee of Cabinet, we stated that in providing our services, there are basic priorities that any firefighter in this province (career or volunteer) should have the right to from an Occupational Health and Safety perspective. We wish to restate these priorities which are:

- 1. Be personally protected from injury and have appropriate protective clothing and breathing apparatus.**
- 2. The right to respond to emergencies in safe and reliable vehicles with appropriate tools to do the job.**
- 3. The right to avail of the appropriate and sufficient amount of training necessary to successfully and safely respond to and mitigate fires and other emergencies.**

In recognition of these 3 fundamental rights above, our main issues surround and embrace these statements. Therefore, we present the following primary issues facing the Newfoundland and Labrador Fire service in 2011.

1. Cost Sharing Program for Fire Trucks

The Association once again, recommends that government increase the funding for the cost shared program for fire trucks to allow for the replacement of a minimum 30 to 35 primary fire apparatus. An increase to 5 million dollars annually is needed in this program immediately.

As outlined to government last year, over 45 % of the fleet of fire pumper trucks in fire departments the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are over 20 years old. Approximately 15% more poised to reach that age in the next 3 to 4 years.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we have not adopted any formal standard of the age of fire trucks. Most North American standards do suggest that the primary first response vehicle in any fire district should be not over 15 years old. It is assumed by these standards that most fire trucks operate and perform as they were designed up until that point before wear and tear and age start to have effect on their performance. Also at 20 years fire trucks are considered obsolete, and at 30 years vehicles are considered antique.

With over 150 vehicles that should be replaced this year alone due to age, it is simple case of mathematics, at the present rate, funding allows for the purchase of only 10 fire pumpers per year. If this funding is maintain at this low level, it will be another 15 years before all municipalities can be able to replace the back log of vehicles that are over 20 years old as of today.

The increase allotted by your government last year was \$800,000 dollars, bringing the total funding pool to 2.5 million dollars of the 5 million requested. This was a move in a positive direction, and we are encouraged that government understands the gravity of the plight, but the reality of the situation is that no great amount of extra pumper trucks were able to be acquired in the past 12 months. This is due to the fact that the majority of the extra increase in funding understandably went to the badly needed replacement of the Aerial Ladder for Carbonear. The replacement of this desperately needed truck impacted the allocations for other desperately needed pumper trucks as well.

To compound the issue, two more Aerial ladder trucks in Grand Falls- Windsor and Gander are in immediate need of replacement. Obviously extra funding is essential to the cost share program for these replacements. It is our fear this year that if the replacement of those two trucks is not special funded on top of the annual allotment; that even fewer fire apparatus will be replaced in the province communities in the next 12 months.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services requests that the provincial government increase funding levels to the cost sharing program. We recommend the program for the replacement of the province's fire trucks be increased from 2.5 million to a minimum of 5 million dollars annually.

We also request that additional, one time funding of 1.5 million should be allocated this year to deal with the replacement of the two aerial ladder units in Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander. By allocating this additional funding, the program to replace at least 20 pumper trucks could be a reality in 2011-12.

Provincial Income Tax Credit: Recruitment and Retention of Firefighters

Recruitment and retention of firefighters is an ongoing challenge and the volunteer fire service is under strain to maintain adequate staffing levels. With the entire volunteer and non-profit sector struggling with maintaining adequate levels the fire service is no different. Furthermore it is recognized that our communities rely very heavily on fire service volunteers for basic life safety, fire protection and disaster mitigation. The tremendous amount of hard work given by the men and women of the fire service during Hurricane Igor is just one shining example that volunteers can accomplish more than any government can in a short time.

A provincial tax credit for those who volunteer their time for the protection of lives and property has been successful in several provinces. Just recently the province of Prince Edward Island is poised to introduce a non refundable

provincial tax credit in the coming budget. They will be joining with the province of Nova Scotia who already provides a non refundable non-refundable provincial income tax credit to their volunteer fire service.

We respectfully ask that the government of Newfoundland and Labrador consider providing a non refundable tax credit of 250 dollars to volunteer firefighters in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Automatic External Defibrillators (AED)

Many fire departments across the province have been accessing Automatic External Defibrillators for the departments. In the past year there has been considerable confusion surrounding the issue of medical oversight in the use of these devices by fire departments to the public.

Right now anyone member of the general public who has a first aid course is able to use a public access defibrillator without concern for liability. Unfortunately the same cannot be stated for a volunteer fire department that may use a defibrillator in the course of its duties, or get called to assist in a medical emergency in their town while waiting for paramedics to arrive.

Somehow

The NLAFS strongly encourages Government , through the Department of Health to consider clearing up the medical protocols surrounding the use of defibrillators for volunteer fire departments whose primary duties do not include medical first response with specifically address and clarify the issue to allow volunteer fire services to provide this critical life saving skill without fear of repercussions.

Ken Roache will email me more in from Heart and Stroke on Tuesday

Provincial 911

We are aware that consultations will soon be conducted on the feasibility of province wide 911. We ask that the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services be included in those discussions for input.

Finally– A Thank you

We thank you for your assistance and the provision of funding last year , especially in the areas of firefighter protective equipment and funding for training assistance for those who have to travel through Municipal training agency.

Summary:

We thank you for your interest in the issues surrounding the provinces fire services. We provide very basic and essential services to our citizen's social safety net. We understand that challenges presented in this brief are complex but please bear in mind that the fire services are critical infrastructure in our communities. This is infrastructure that is not funded through a paid workforce, but everyday citizens stepping up to fill a need by volunteering a part of their lives.

Governments on all levels have a duty to provide for those who serve to the best of their ability. The province of Newfoundland has been in no better fiscal shape to step up for the years it could not. We sincerely hope that in this day and age, the provincial government will become the true partner it can be to the province's fire service.

We need to have the fire service supported adequately to at least address our very basic safety needs be met adequately.

While this brief covers our fundamental priorities as seen from this association, other issues presented in previous briefs are still being pursued such as the 911 service have still yet to be fully addressed.

We trust you will endeavor to see your way through to meet our requests, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services stands ready to partner and consult with government to provide a top quality fire service to all Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans.

Respectfully submitted,

Vince J. Mackenzie

Vince Mackenzie
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NLAFS