

WI Fire & EMS Legislative Leadership Coalition

April 16, 2009

Senator Mark Miller, Co-chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 317 E
P. O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Representative Mark Pocan, Co-chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 309-East
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

PROFESSIONAL
FIRE FIGHTERS OF
WI, INC.

WI CHAPTER
INTERNATIONAL
ARSON
INVESTIGATORS
ASSOCIATION

WI FIRE CHIEFS
EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

WI FIRE
INSPECTORS
ASSOCIATION

WI SOCIETY OF
FIRE SERVICE
INSTRUCTORS

WI STATE FIRE
CHIEFS
ASSOCIATION

WI STATE
FIRE FIGHTERS
ASSOCIATION

WI EMS
Association

RE: 2% Dues Lapse and WCTC Fire Schools Local Assistance Increase

Dear Senator Miller and Representative Pocan:

The Wisconsin Fire & EMS Legislative Leadership Coalition would like to thank you and the Joint Finance Committee on the exceptional work you must perform in reviewing the biennial budget, it must be a monumental task.

The Coalition would like to express opposition regarding the proposed increase in funding for WCTC under chapter 20.292(1)(Gr) Fire schools local assistance, specifically detailed in 2009 Assembly Bill 75, page 191 line 21. 2009 AB 75 reflects an increase in spending of \$144,000 in FY 2010, and \$225,600 in FY 2011. This is a 30.8% increase in spending over the biennium. The line item in question detailed as Fire schools local assistance is allocated to the WCTC to train firefighters at the local level.

We are in favor of providing appropriate training for firefighters. We can not support this increase. In recent history the Coalition has struggled to obtain accountability on how these funds were spent in WCTC. WCTC has refused to be forthcoming with information that the fire service has requested. The fire service in the past has not had input on how these funds are spent.

The 2% Dues fund is created by taking 2% of all fire insurance premiums written on Wisconsin properties. The \$14,700,000 2% Dues fund is used to fund the WI Technical College to provide fire training, to fund the Department of Commerce for code development/ code enforcement and the remainder of the funds are distributed to the fire departments in the State of Wisconsin. The funds that are distributed to the fire departments in the state come to each department with minimum requirements that must be met or the funding is withheld from that department. Each department is required to inspect every commercial property in that fire department's service area once each six months and is required to provide minimum training for each member of the department. The portion of 2% Dues funding that distributed to each fire department does not meet the costs of providing the inspections every six months leaving many departments with little incentive to meet the minimum requirements established by the Department of Commerce.

These funds help sustain fire departments in hard times. At a time when each community's funding is decreasing with tax levy caps, shared revenue cuts and local revenues decreasing, the cut in 2% Dues funding for each department in the state will require more cuts in public safety by local fire departments.

We do have a solution to fix this problem in the future. We believe that statutory changes are necessary for the fire service to be able to have a voice of oversight on programs and expenditures. Fire service "customer" oversight is imperative to the ever expanding mission of training firefighters in Wisconsin. We are requesting that the Joint Committee on Finance deny this increase, until statutory changes allow the following:

- Define legitimate expenses to receive funding under the 2% Dues Program.
- Create a state governance board not advisory board for WCTC Fire Programs, composed of members of the Coalition partners and fire service members at large.
- Finally develop rules for accountability reporting to create transparency in the WCTC programs.

If you have any questions please contact me, Larry Plumer, Chair of the Coalition and President of the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association at 1-800-588-2989.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Plumer" followed by a stylized flourish or initials.

Larry Plumer
Chair

C: Committee Membership
Annette Severson - WCTC