

Central Coventry Fire District

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Firefighter Overtime bills will ruin fire district

COVENTRY, RHODE ISLAND – The General Assembly is intent on pushing the Central Coventry Fire District back towards bankruptcy. That's what's likely to happen if Speaker Mattiello allows H5662 and H5663, the so-called firefighter overtime bills to pass. As the Board of Directors for the CCFD, we're well aware of the need to properly compensate our dedicated first responders. But supporting these bills eliminates one tool that communities can use to curb costs. Even if your community does not operate under a 3-platoon model or the rules of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act ("FLSA"), these bills will give you one less tool to find savings as RI communities continue to face insurmountable fiscal challenges.

The hard work that has gone into bringing financial stability to the CCFD over the past 4 years since the State Receiver dismissed the Chapter 9 bankruptcy case will be flushed down the drain in one sweep of the pen. The cost to the CCFD will be at least \$721,000 annually; put another way, the taxpayers of Coventry are looking at a 15% increase to the district budget. As a Board, we have provided our personnel 2 new rescue vehicles, 2 new fire trucks, new safety equipment and other necessary implements to deliver the best level of service to the taxpayers we can. To explain away that we can continue to use the 3-platoon model and simply pay overtime ignores the Union's comments that they work too many hours in the first place. Thus, these bills will force communities to hire more staff, it will increase the Union dues-paying memberships to in-turn fund the politicians who would support this legislation.

In addition, these bills severely erode management rights turning the fire chief's position into little more than a babysitter. The Board of Directors then has only 1 role: figure out how to suck

more tax money from the already-overburdened taxpaying public. These bills make overtime yet another unfunded state mandate, with no financial support coming from Smith Hill. Essentially, the budgets for fire suppression and EMS services will be in the hands of the Union, not the people charged with running the districts and communities.

These bills leave the local voters to pick up the tab while the politicians meet at the Capital Grille and congratulate themselves on a job well-done. The General Assembly is all boot, no cattle...but we shouldn't be surprised.

**Fred Gralinski, President,
Central Coventry Fire District
Board of Directors**