



SALCHA FIRE & RESCUE, Inc.

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Representative Eric Feige
House District 12
State Capitol Room 126
Juneau, Alaska 99801

17 Mar 2011

House Bill 170 Support --Municipal property tax exemptions on residences of certain volunteer emergency services personnel and the widows and widowers of volunteer emergency services personnel.

Eric

Thank you for introducing HB 170. This proposed legislation addresses an extremely important issue affecting the future of almost every emergency services organization in our state: **Recruiting and retaining quality volunteers to provide emergency services to our communities.**

Particularly in rural communities, like Salcha, we can't afford to hire paid staff. We depend entirely on the time-honored tradition of local volunteers to serve our community. It is no surprise that volunteerism is on the decline nationwide, and with the weak economy and skyrocketing fuel prices, our current volunteers are working harder and longer just to survive. New, quality, recruits are facing the same situation. The mere act of buying gasoline to respond to emergencies is becoming a significant burden on household budgets.

At the same time, our borough governments continue to raise both property taxes and assessed value of our homes. Again, an additional burden on household budgets... along with heating oil prices going through the roof. The Fairbanks North Star Borough currently offers a \$10,000 reduction in assessed value as compensation to our volunteers, which we are grateful for. However the real return on most property values in our community amounts to the equivalent of a few tanks of gasoline for our car, which our volunteer responders burn through in a few weeks. At \$4 per gallon, annual out of pocket gasoline expenses for our volunteers in the rural areas can amount to over \$1000 dollars!

HB 170 can provide a real incentive for our most valued volunteers, those who have a vested stake in our communities, those who are volunteers for years. The proposed \$200,000 reduction in assessed property value provides real incentive for our dedicated volunteers, gives their household budget a break, and shows them that we value their sacrifice by helping them keep their homes. Without dedicated volunteers, I can guarantee you that volunteer emergency services organizations like Salcha Rescue will not survive, especially in rural areas.

If there is any additional information you need, please feel free to call me directly (488-5275@work, 490-5999@home) or email (chief@acsalaska.net).

Sincerely,

Jim Skotnicki

JAMES R. SKOTNICKI, Chief
Salcha Fire and Rescue