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House Political Subdivisions

HB #1435 - (1/28/2021 Hearing – 3:00 P.M.)

Dear Chair Dockter and Honorable Members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee:

I have concerns with House Bill #1435 relating to peace officers, patrolmen, correctional officers, and firefighters who die in the line of duty; and to provide for retroactive application.

The bill is unclear as to whether the governing body is responsible to provide 100% of the health benefits for the surviving spouse until the surviving spouse receives health benefits from another source or reaches age 65 and the dependent child until the dependent child reaches age 26 or receives health benefits from another source. Depending on the intent of the bill, this obligation could have a serious financial impact for many years to local political subdivisions (taxpayers).

The idea to support the surviving spouse and dependent child as a result of a line-of-duty death is honorable, but placing this obligation on a political subdivision will have a huge impact on its budget for an indefinite amount of years. Further, the political subdivision could potentially be paying for more than one policy, depending on how many dependents that are required to be covered after the age of 26 or if more than one officer or firefighter lost their life in the line of duty.

There are so many uncertainties in HB #1435. I would like to offer a suggestion to create a fund at the State level to provide health coverage for line-of-duty deaths in North Dakota. Catastrophic incidents such as losing an officer or firefighter in the line of duty impacts our entire State, and spreading the costs over the entire State would have less of an impact to local entities, some of which may have limited funding if such an incident would occur.

Due to the sensitivity of the issue being addressed in HB #1435, I am not taking a stand, I am simply expressing that if such an incident were to occur, the financial impact to local political subdivisions could be devastating.

Sincerely,
Allyn Sveen
Stanley City Auditor

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