



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS OF GROTON

LOCAL 4879

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To The Fire Department Staffing Task Force,

The Professional Fire Fighters of Groton Local 4879 would like to express our full support and respect for Chief McCurdy and his efforts to continuously improve the services provided to the community by the fire department. Throughout Chief McCurdy tenure he has worked tirelessly to ensure that the mission of the fire department is meeting the expected level of service throughout the community. These efforts include creating and implementing a set of standard operating policies and procedures, increasing the volume and quality of training, along with increasing recruitment and retention efforts by the department to a level that surpasses anything in the departments past, just to name a few of the items on his growing list of accomplishments. The result of this effort has been the continuous improvement of operational delivery, making services more effective and efficient while increasing the level of safety for both department members and the public. These efforts have also resulted in a dramatic improvement of the morale of both the career and call staff.

The staffing levels during the day time hours (06:00 – 18:00) have become an issue over the past couple months. Normally weekday shifts are staffed with 4 personnel plus the Chief. Over the last three months we have had to operate at a reduced staffing level approximately 30% of the time. The level of staffing throughout the last three months has ranged from the full complement of four personnel to as low as a single person. The staffing shortfall creates working environment with a lower than acceptable level of safety, along with lowering the department ability to provide adequate emergency services. This trend seems to occur multiple times a year. The members of the department have been stepping up to cover these gaps to the best of their ability, however members have families and other commitments that have to be balanced as well. By having to cover these gaps, our members are being exposed to more stress and physical demand than what is typical for emergency services. When day shifts run short or are unable to be filled, the effects can often be overwhelming. During a day shift that is short the Chief may be forced to take on a role as a responder in addition to his normal managerial duties.

Some of the on-call night shifts are running short as well (18:00 – 06:00), making for unsafe working conditions which can result in poor service to the town's people. While the men and women who make up the call department are dedicated members of this community they have fulltime jobs elsewhere along with family obligations and many other commitments. They are truly giving all they have to give. The volume of shifts that many of these individuals cover has the potential for burnout due to these employees spreading themselves to thin over an extended period of time.



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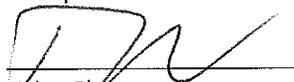
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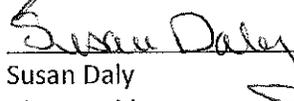
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Unfortunately volunteerism as a whole is down, this can be seen in the steady decline in the number of call firefighters across the country. We can see this issue first hand in our department when the department was forced to close West Groton Station 2 due to the lack of call members. This is also reflected in when an on-call shift runs short or is unfilled, it often means response times become longer and some calls may be answered by other towns.

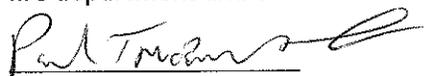
Exhausting mutual aid is something that also needs to be considered. We already heavily rely on mutual aid for their ALS services (Advanced Life Support). When we are constantly asking for their assistance because we cannot answer the call, there could be a future impact. The flip side to us using mutual aid is that we need to be staffed to assist them when needed as well. Mutual aid only works if there is a mutual availability and response from both parties involved.

The issues around fulltime staffing is not a problem that was only recognized recently, Chief McCurdy has been advising the town of the need for increased staffing since taking over as Fire Chief. The Professional Fire Fighters of Groton Local 4879 stand behind all of the decisions that Chief McCurdy has made to improve our service to the town and the wellbeing of our department. He has brought to the town's attention an issue that is a priority of ours as well, staffing. It is his job to advise the town on complicated matters involving the fire department and its response to calls for service. The Chief is advising the town that there is a need for increased staffing to allow the fire department to succeed in their mission. The Professional Fire Fighters of Groton fully agree with the Chief and wish to publicly support his decision. Chief McCurdy has done an outstanding job leading and growing this department. The career staff feel that the town needs to recognize Chief McCurdy as the most qualified person to interpret what the needs of the fire department and the community are.


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