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State Representative Harry Benton (97th)

Benton Voices Support for Volunteer Firefighter Tax Credit

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – State Rep. Harry Benton, D-Plainfield, is joining legislative colleagues in voicing support for a recent push to include tax credits for volunteer firefighters in the FY2024 Illinois Budget. The effort gained increased urgency following the deadly, 72-car pile up on Interstate 55 near Farmersville, IL, south of Springfield, which occurred on May 1 after a dust storm cut visibility to near zero, resulting in 7 deaths and over 30 injuries.

“The tragic mass casualty on I-55 last Monday is just the latest incident that shows how invaluable volunteer first responders are to our state,” Benton said. “In the immediate aftermath, volunteer first responders played a key role in the initial efforts that kept the human cost lower than it very easily might otherwise have been. Potentially dozens of people may have escaped death or serious injury because of their selfless heroism, and we all owe them a debt of gratitude.”

According to the Illinois Firefighters Association, volunteers supplement emergency response systems all across Illinois, and in some areas even make up the vast majority of first responders. According to FEMA, up to 85% of Illinois fire departments rely significantly on volunteers. Benton says this should give voters and lawmakers cause for concern, as increasing shortages of these volunteers impact the ability of many fire departments to handle the volume of calls in their jurisdictions.

“With each passing year, more of these indispensable public servants retire or are forced to scale back or stop their involvement in volunteering,” Benton said. “Part of the problem is low pay, with volunteer firefighters averaging less than \$10,000 a year in stipends in exchange for their service. In today’s economy, that amount is simply not enough for many to continue volunteering, even if they want to. That’s why it’s important for us to do anything and everything we can to better support volunteer first responders in Illinois. Including a \$500 state income tax credit in next year’s budget would be a great first step in solving this problem. Efforts are underway to do just that, and I am proud to support them.”

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