

Sent via e-mail: sylvia.jones@ontario.ca

February 25, 2022

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Solicitor General of Ontario
George Drew Building, 18th Floor
25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y6

RE: Firefighter Certification

Dear Solicitor General Jones,

I write to you concerning the draft regulations regarding firefighter certification in response to the posting made on January 28, 2022.

To start, the brevity of the consultation process means that the AMO Board of Directors (and we suspect, the vast majority of municipal councils), have not had a chance to consider or review the proposed regulations in question. The Fire Marshal of Ontario office's distribution of a written presentation to municipal officials, with only three business days to the close of the consultation period, did not facilitate thoughtful municipal review. We would also observe the two technical briefings for municipal officials seemed to be hastily convened. The consultation notice asked for invitations not to be shared. We are concerned that a lack of sharing, and not knowing who was invited, likely contributed to the low municipal participation rates of these sessions.

It is our view that this consultation process is not an example of the type of broad-based municipal engagement necessary for regulations of this scale and scope. As municipal governments are the employers and funders of fire services, we had expected a more comprehensive and transparent consultation with our members.

We believe a more thorough engagement with the municipal sector is necessary for the Ministry to fully appreciate the effects such regulations will have on municipal governments and their fire services. We, therefore, would ask for a two-month extension to afford an appropriate amount of time for the Ministry officials to brief municipal leaders and for councils to be able to thoughtfully reply back on the draft regulations to your Ministry. We understand that the smallest municipalities will be affected the most by these proposed regulations. Ministry outreach must be targeted especially to these communities.

Despite these consultation shortcomings, and without the benefit of broad-based member input, we can offer some preliminary commentary for your consideration. In principle, certification is a step in the right direction. Municipal governments are supportive of efforts to modernize and enhance the professionalism of the fire services that serve Ontario communities. That said, we would ask that the above statement should not be construed or represented as an AMO endorsement of the draft regulations.

AMO understands that the Ontario Seal would provide flexibility based on basic National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) professional qualification standards without requiring NFPA certification. To that end, the Ontario Seal proposed in the current draft is an improved certification approach compared to earlier regulations revoked in 2019.

Legacy provisions are very important to ensure that municipalities are not burdened with unnecessary costs for retraining firefighters who have been adequately trained to the level of service set by Council. We are pleased to see they are included. But such provisions must also include measures which attract and retain volunteer firefighters to serve within their communities. Additional training measures and certification must not serve as an added impediment for those who wish to volunteer as firefighters. Full-time fire fighters simply are not an option for most small, rural, and northern municipalities. The Ministry must propose measures which assist and support volunteer recruitment and composite fire services.

To date, AMO members and fire chiefs have advised that the Ontario certification process will create additional training and new cost pressures on fire services. To that end, it is our request that the Ministry provide some form of financial support during the 4 – 6-year implementation period. The level of support necessary should be based on evidence from fire chiefs and should include the submission of detailed training needs and expected impacts. We urge that fire chiefs be provided with a sufficient period of time to submit detailed fiscal and training impacts to the Ministry and their municipal councils. These training proposals can be used by the Ministry to design a means of providing financial support for small, rural, northern, volunteer, and composite fire services (or any service disproportionately burdened by certification) over the 4 – 6-year implementation period.

We should also point out that there is a distinction between providing local fire services with the support necessary to complete training and the Ministry's support of the Fire Marshal's office to carry out and complete certifications across Ontario. Both need adequate resources to successfully complete certification.

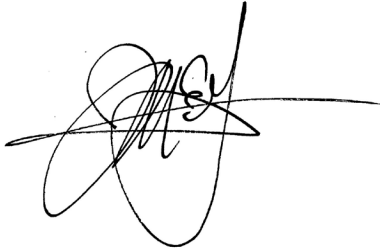
Similarly, the regulatory in-force date (currently July 1, 2022), must be moved well into 2023 or 2024 to fully prevent any in-year municipal budget hits and allow for good municipal financial planning. Of course, the level of multi-year provincial financial support offered to support certification will have a bearing on the in-force date and the adequacy of the lead up period.

As well, the certification process needs to be better aligned with the existing Community Risk Assessments that fire services have been asked to complete by 2025. It seems that the cart is being put in front of the horse. We would ask that these two initiatives be better aligned.

We would also note that the provision of fire services to the unincorporated areas of the province be addressed in an equitable manner to what is expected by municipal governments. Provincial reliance on municipalities to deliver this service, without paying for it, is not right or fair for municipal property taxpayers. This must also be addressed.

I trust these comments will assist the Ministry with its next steps.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. McGarvey', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jamie McGarvey
AMO President and Mayor of Parry Sound

cc: The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Debbie Conrad, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Research and
Innovation Division, Ministry of the Solicitor General
Jon Pegg, Fire Marshal of Ontario, Ministry of the Solicitor General
Rob Grimwood, President of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC), and
Deputy Chief, Mississauga Fire and Emergency Services