

Testimony for HF 1075 / SF 1576 – 03/10/23

March 3, 2023

RE: Testimony requesting support for HF1075 / SF1576

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee:  
Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

My name is Dona Greiner, and I am the Stevens County and Big Stone County Emergency Management Director. I also serve as the Local ARMER System Administrator for the Stevens County Sheriff and serve on many regional committees.

ARMER is the backbone of public safety communication infrastructure in the State of Minnesota. It's a priority to ensure that emergency radios are up to date and able to provide interoperability for our EMS, first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel.

On July 25, 2021, a 9 1 1 emergency call was made in the City of Clinton. The caller reported a large elevator fire. There were nineteen fire departments and seventeen other departments from multiple counties supporting the response over a two-day period. All responding fire departments were able to communicate over the 800 MHz ARMER radio system. These departments have aging radios and are in desperate need of funding for replacement radios.

Days after the incident, Governor Walz, Congresswoman Fischbach, Senator Westrom and Representative Backer visited the location and heard from local emergency services departments. One of the Fire Chiefs, who responded to the fire in Clinton, explained his concern of how small departments are unable to replace aging radios. He explained that the money they bring in by fundraising is used to replace equipment that is needed to fight the fires. They also have a small tax base and their members are all volunteer.

This funding will:

- Maintain interoperability for our emergency response departments throughout the State of Minnesota.
- Allow for emergency response departments who do not have an adequate funding source to replace aging or inoperable radios.
- Allow departments that may have an inadequate number of radios in their workforce to purchase needed radios. This will improve their communication capabilities while enhancing responder safety when responding to a 9 1 1 call for help.

The following points provide awareness of the immediate need for funding throughout the State of Minnesota.

- Radios purchased years ago have begun to reach the end of life, and end of support for the products.
- Replacement parts for the aging radios are difficult to find or no-longer available.
- Replacement of ARMER radios range in price from \$2500-\$6000, depending on the model and need.

- Many local government units can only provide funding through their levies. This is a direct impact to the local taxpayers and an increase to local levies. Small rural county emergency service departments do not have levy authority to fund radio replacements.

Last year, we received numerous letters from throughout Minnesota in support of this bill. Again, this year, we are receiving letters of support and resolutions from counties, cities, emergency services leaders and Associations.

Thank you for your time, I greatly appreciate this opportunity to represent our emergency services departments.