

Testimony of Representative Kate Harper (R-61<sup>st</sup>,  
Montgomery) On HB 60, To relieve Volunteer Firefighters  
of Standby Sprinkler Charges, before the House Committee  
on Consumer Affairs October 25, 2011

Good Morning, Chairman Godshall and Chairman Preston, and Members of the Consumer Affairs Committee. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify about HB 60, my bill to relieve volunteer firefighters, nonprofit rescue squads, and ambulance services of the need to pay “stand by” charges for having fire suppression sprinklers.

Like most legislation, this bill was suggested by a constituent who contacted me on behalf of the Harmonville Fire Company in Plymouth Township, Montgomery County. Here is what the President of the Fire Company told me:

“In 1992, Harmonville built a new building at 2100 Butler Pike. The building codes did not require a fire sprinkler but we opted to have it installed throughout the building. Our thought was that it was a great tool to fight fire, so how can we ask businesses to install them if we do not put a system in our building? The problem came after it was installed and the building opened, Aqua invoiced us for a sprinkler line to the building. The charge is approximately \$200 *per month*, even though no water is used. ...if water is used, it is metered and invoiced on the monthly bill. ...It is a substantial amount of money for us to spend for something that is not used...Our request to you is there something that can be done to have the water company waive the costs associated with fire sprinklers to the firehouse...?”

I contacted Aqua myself to see if, perhaps, they could waive the fee and take it as a corporate donation to the volunteer fire company, but they refused. In essence, their response was that if I felt that volunteer fire companies should get this break, then they would have to be permitted to charge it in their rates

to their entire customer base. They also worried that many other worthy causes would make the same request. This is understandable, so I had this bill drafted and introduced.

Essentially, if my bill is approved, Aqua would be permitted to add a few cents to the costs charged to the entire rate base to pay these costs, and the volunteer firefighters could spend hours and hours of less time raising money for “something that’s never used.” This is one case where sharing the costs is probably warranted.

I know I don’t have to tell the members of this Committee how hard it is these days for our volunteer first responders. In addition to their “real jobs,” these men and women spend countless hours at the firehouse already in mandatory training, and in fundraising activities. The customers of the water company are their “customers” too.

I know the Members of this House understand that if these volunteer fire companies don’t survive, the costs to our local governments will be substantial and enduring. I doubt that any of my constituents would mind a few pennies extra each year to relieve the volunteer firefighters of the burden of raising money to pay \$2400 or more per year. What’s the profit on a day’s worth of hoagie sales? How many hoagies does the volunteer fire company have to sell to pay the monthly bill for a stand-by charge? Truthfully, how many firehouses even HAVE sprinklers? It would mean a great deal to my volunteer firefighters to be relieved of the need to raise money for these stand-by charges and likely be unnoticeable either to Aqua’s shareholders or to Aqua’s customers, both of whom benefit mightily because when they call 911, these volunteers respond.