



Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities and

Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia

Joint Submission to the Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia's (FSANS)
Fire Services Review



NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION
OF MUNICIPALITIES



Introduction

The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia (AMANS) are happy that fire prevention services are being given their warranted attention in the Governance Review of Fire and Associated Services by the Fire Services of Nova Scotia Association (FSANS).

NSFM and AMANS are making a joint submission as part of this review to bring attention to critical issues and improvements from the municipal perspective. As indicated in the FSANS Request for Proposals (RFP), this review must build on the diligent and in-depth work conducted in past reviews such as the Fire Services Seniors Officials Committee (FSSOC) Final Report (2012) and the Municipal Review of Fire Services Nova Scotia (2017) (herein referred to as the Pomax Report). Recent record-breaking wildfire activity has demonstrated the impacts of climate change and rising average temperatures. Therefore, identifying and addressing issues that restrain the full potential of fire prevention services in Nova Scotia is as crucial as ever and NSFM and AMANS are proud to contribute to this effort.

Municipalities hold valuable insights on the problems and solutions of fire prevention services in their jurisdictions that can aid significant province-wide improvements. Municipalities are well situated to play an oversight role to advance solutions and are deeply informed about the growing costs of fire prevention services. While municipalities hold a wealth of local insights and dedication to address local issues, municipalities will be challenged by any new financial implications arising from this review. One of the main challenges is indeed the variety of funding models that municipalities use to support fire prevention services. Therefore, solely allotting new responsibilities to municipalities will not be an effective way to improve and modernize fire prevention in Nova Scotia. Rather, fire prevention services will be improved through a partner-based approach in which the provincial government and municipal governments work together to ensure the necessary financial and regulatory resources are available to reach a high level of service to the public.

Executive Summary

Improved fire prevention services have been envisioned in review after review, including After-Action Reports. The documentation of these reports is helpful for problem identification but it is the will to make the necessary changes that will bring about lasting solutions. New challenges created by climate change and population growth exacerbate the longstanding problems of decreased volunteerism, complex asset management and funding restraints.

- Province-wide performance, equipment, and training standards will provide clear grounds for municipalities to play their oversight role and apolitical grounds for fire

Note on Cover Image: The image on the cover of this submission is a map showing the location of the 380 Fire Station Buildings (BLFS40 and BLFS60) across Nova Scotia.

service consolidation when found to be necessary or advantageous in the public interest.

- Establishing standards across the province must not be done on a standalone basis or haphazardly. Any requirement, along with additional cost, must be measured and achievable. There is significant insurance risk to introducing minimum standards without a rationalization of the system that is subject to them.
- Mandating municipalities to provide a fire service per Section 293 of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) – by amending “may” to “shall” – will introduce significantly increased cost and legal risk to municipalities.
- Amending 294(1) of the MGA and 305(1) of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* (HRMC) to require annual registration will enable municipal council of jurisdictions to better ensure that fire departments can provide a sufficient level of service. Ultimately, a municipal council should be able to set the level of service, based on minimum standards, for its community.
- Training resources and joint-training opportunities should be widely available to all fire prevention partners.
- There should be a central provincial department from which training requirements, equipment standards and performance measures are mandated and facilitated.
- Municipal councils should have ultimate discretion in setting the levy collected from ratepayers for fire services in all instances in which municipalities are mandated to transfer funds to a fire department. The *Rural Fire District Act* (RFDA) prevents that from happening.
- There are various funding and governance models for fire service in place across the province. This will be difficult to standardize as each model plays into a complex set of tax policies in each municipality. Following this review, the provincial government must work with municipalities in the long-term effort required to address these problems.
- Municipal funds are largely exhausted and new funding sources (grants or Fire Services Modernization Transfer Program) is the way to reach the next generation of fire prevention services. Many municipalities will struggle with raising property taxes to fund additional standards for training and service levels.
- Capital funding, support for training, and funding for day-to-day operations and equipment must all be improved in the interest of more effective fire prevention in Nova Scotia. Efficiencies can be found within the fire service to ensure an optimal distribution of funds.
- Without province-wide investment and efforts to obtain economies of scale, the capacity of fire departments will continue to be determined by the local ability to finance these services. The locally determined level of funding results in a fragmented and inconsistent level of service across the province despite the indiscriminate, province-wide threat of fire.

- Provincial purchasing power can also help create opportunities for economies of scale and bulk purchasing programs that municipalities and fire departments can access. Bulk purchasing arrangements or direct equipment allocation will directly improve affordability and asset management.
- Local fire departments often provide medical first responder services for their community. The province should review the relationship between Emergency Health Services (EHS) funding and Medical First Response (MFR) calls and determine if this network of (primarily) volunteers should be relied upon to provide MFR services at no cost to EHS or the provincial purse.
- In order to determine the ideal organizational structure of fire prevention services, municipalities should be supported in conducting risk assessments, jurisdictional master planning, and evaluations with training, support for professional services and templates.
- It is extremely important to support firefighter safety and mental well-being to retain and protect members of the fire service.
- The current dispatch systems across the province adds risk to the delivery of fire services. Municipalities recognize the importance of regional or provincial, computer-aided dispatch to improve response times and coordination.
- The Government of Nova Scotia can play a role in incentivizing volunteer recruitment and managing human resources through mutual aid agreements with provincial services.
- Ensuring mutual aid is being delivered efficiently and with minimal legal risk would provide value to fire service providers and municipalities. Intermunicipal assistance and mutual aid agreements can be improved with formalization, guidance for termination clauses, model provisions, mediation processes, and shared asset models.
- Municipalities need to be at the table when fire prevention services improvements are being established as municipalities are the primary funders of fire services.

Research Underlying This Report

Many issues and opportunities for improvement in fire prevention services are longstanding. Incremental improvements have been accomplished with pressing opportunities identified in past reviews. To make the most out of insights and recommendations identified in past reviews, this submission is supported by research on the FSSOC Report, the Pomax Report, as well as recent After-Action Reports from wildfires in Tantallon and Shelburne County. Together, these reports provide valuable insights on how to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of fire prevention services.

This report also draws upon insights from subject matter specialists among the NSFM and AMANS membership. An NSFM Representative on the Joint Fire Services Partnership Committee was able to share in-depth and current insights on how to support and evaluate

effective fire prevention services identified by a formal review by their council in 2024. AMANS has engaged its Board of Directors and the CAOs that currently sit on the Department of Emergency Management's CAO Advisory Table for feedback to inform municipal administrative perspectives on the fire services review.

Finally, this joint submission draws from opportunities identified by the Public Safety Working Group during a review of the MGA in 2020. The consultation and in-depth research supporting each of these past reviews further enriches the consultation conducted as part of the current review.

Vision Underlying This Report

Key issues identified in past reports can be boiled down to issues of: 1) inadequate funding; 2) the absence of provincial standards for both training and operating models; and, 3) the fraught governance structure that is currently enabled by fire services legislation (i.e.: *Fire Safety Act*, *Municipal Government Act*, *Rural Fire District Act*, *Forests Act*, and the *Emergency Management Act*, etc.). Municipalities play a vital role in supporting fire prevention services, but this role is undermined by these key issues.

Given this central role, municipal capacity to govern is often a focus of reviews on fire services in Nova Scotia. The Pomax Report notes that the municipal ability to maintain and provide fire and emergency services is not limited by legislation but rather the lack of a structure to advise municipalities on fire service operational, training, and capital needs and sufficient sources of funding. The Pomax Report states that “with sufficient funds, municipalities would be able to 1) undertake studies to determine the fire and emergency protection needs in their communities; and 2) implement a fire and emergency services protection system commensurate with identified needs [by engaging in] public education, prevention, suppression, rescue, training, and other identified requirements.” Understanding how to develop and empower the municipal role in fire prevention services with administrative guidelines, sources of funding and a broader legislative environment is key to success.

Without a province-wide effort to pursue these improvements, fire prevention services will only reach their potential in municipalities that are able to secure sufficient resources, leaving less-resourced areas (usually small rural communities) to grapple with gaps and limited capacity. Municipalities need to be heard and will not be able to accept recommendations from this process without understanding the full extent of the costs to implement and where those funds will come from. The recommendations below are meant to guide this important review towards the most productive and actionable results possible. Municipalities can play an active oversight role but require new sources of authority, financial assistance, and training resources in order to advance improvements in fire prevention services.

Recommendations

The points below are drawn from published reports and insights on current issues. Recommendations and supporting points are organized under the headings provided in the FSANS RFP Deliverables; these headings are occasionally merged to account for overlaps in responses or lack of input on a specific heading.

Governance and Oversight:

The longstanding need for fire prevention governance in Nova Scotia has led to a range of legislative initiatives that are now dated and, at times, at cross purposes with one another. As one example, the RFDA allows Commissioners to set area rates and service boundaries, which leaves municipal councils with limited grounds to govern the provision of fire services as spelled out in the Municipal Government Act (MGA) and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (HRMC). The modernization of fire prevention requires a coherent overarching legislated framework that provides a clear division of responsibilities and authority.

Municipal councils can be more empowered as the local government in charge of providing fire prevention services to their residents with amendments to sections 294 and 296 of the MGA/305 and 307 of the HRMC with regulatory backing for these sections. Amending 294(1) of the MGA/305(1) of the HRMC to require annual registration will enable the municipal council of jurisdiction to better ensure that fire departments are capable of providing a sufficient level of service. Requiring fire departments to report training and service levels annually, rather than just at the point of initial registration, will allow municipal councils to monitor fluctuations in services and capacity. These annual reports could be presented and discussed in an open session of council to keep the public informed. Municipalities could, in turn, submit these reports to the Fire Marshall to support province-wide oversight.

As identified in past reviews, the missing piece of governance and oversight is province-wide standards and performance measures for what constitutes a properly prepared and equipped fire department. The lack of standards is distinct from Department of Natural Resources-led wildfire prevention, which demonstrates that the provincial government understands the importance of these standards. Regulatory standards and performance measures would provide a clear and sufficiently authoritative basis for municipal councils to fulfill their role under sections 294(2) and 296(2) of the MGA/305(2) and 307(2) of the HRMC. Municipal councils can adopt these standards as the basis for training levels, asset management, and service delivery.

The RFDA may have provided a valuable basis for volunteer fire departments to be established in unserved areas. However, this dated statute is in dire need of review. Further, and as will be discussed in the below section on funding models, municipal councils should have ultimate discretion in setting the levy collected from ratepayers for fire services in all instances in which municipalities are mandated to transfer funds to a fire department.

Another prevailing governance issue identified in past reports is the myriad provincial departments that oversee parts of fire services in Nova Scotia. Along with the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Municipal Affairs, and the Department of Labour Skills and Immigration, the newly established Department of Emergency Management creates an unnecessarily complicated and fragmented approach to provincial oversight. This legislative situation was identified as unique in comparison to other provinces in the Fire Services Senior Officials Committee (FSSOC) Report in 2012 and was confirmed by the current Minister of Emergency Management, the Honourable Kim Masland, in her remarks that “no government department has direct oversight of firefighters the way that Justice does over policing” in recent media coverage on the closing of the Fire School (August 6, 2025, AllNovaScotia). To provide a clear and coordinated point of contact, there should be a central provincial body, such as the Office of the Fire Marshall, from which training requirements, equipment standards and performance measures are mandated and facilitated. As the scope and approach of this central provincial body is being developed, municipalities need to be at the table as the primary funder and oversight body of local fire prevention services.

The final point in governance is with respect to Section 293 of the MGA, which states “A municipality *may* maintain and provide fire and emergency services by providing the service, assisting others to provide the service, working with others to provide the service or a combination of means.” Past reviews have suggested that perhaps the *may* should be amended to *shall*. Although only one word, this change would be a significant increase of costs and liability facing municipalities and should not be considered. This change would not help to address any of the systemic issues discussed in this submission and would be impractical for many municipalities.

Operations, Scope of Service, and Training:

As has been demonstrated by recent years of record-breaking wildfire activity, the need for fire prevention services that are ready to respond to a range of emergent challenges is an indispensable part of public safety in Nova Scotia. Reasonable standards for training, service delivery and asset management will provide the grounds for increasingly important coordination of fire departments, municipalities, and the provincial government in pursuit of sustainable and effective fire prevention services.

Municipal councils could be provided with service evaluation and risk assessment tools that can be applied to their respective jurisdictions along with resources to do the assessments. Supporting all municipalities to conduct these assessments will provide a clearer picture of what level of fire services are necessary locally. Evaluations and gap analysis can be applied to local fire departments in the interest of identifying training, equipment, service, and, ultimately, funding needs. Such risk assessment and fire department evaluation tools are increasingly necessary due to the impacts of climate change across the province. Risk assessments can be used to properly plan preventative safety measures such as dry

hydrants and safer subdivisions with multiple exist and entry points, which will aid fire prevention services at the response stage.

A symbolic intersection of various pressing needs was tragically demonstrated in the avoidable death of an aspiring fire fighter at the Fire School. Effective asset management is key to both effective fire prevention services and fire fighter safety, as is sufficient training. The recent closure of the Fire School creates an undeniable need to improve where and how fire fighter training is provided. The provincial government should identify new central locations for fire services training and engage creatively in new training opportunities, such as mobile training provided in rural areas. Along with establishing a new approach to providing initial and ongoing training to fire fighters, the provincial government should also introduce training standards that will ensure a high level of fire prevention capacity and safety for fire fighters. Standards are established for wildfire prevention, and this same approach should be taken with day-to-day fire prevention. Legislated training standards and provincial supports to fulfill these training standards was identified as common across Canada in the 2012 FSSOC Report; Nova Scotia must catch up to this longstanding trend. Training resources and joint-training opportunities should be widely provided to all fire prevention partners.

Mutual aid between fire departments is often relied on in Nova Scotia. Ensuring mutual aid is being delivered in the most efficient manner would provide value to fire service providers and municipalities. Providing risk management tools to facilitate mutual aid in regions would be a benefit the fire departments and mitigate municipal liability.

Local fire departments often provide other non-traditional services such as high angle rescue, swift water rescue and Medical First Responder (MFR) services for their community. For some departments MFR calls are minimal, however for many departments MFR calls are the majority of their calls. The Government of Nova Scotia should review the relationship between EHS funding and MFR calls and determine if this network of (primarily) volunteers should be relied upon to provide MFR services at no cost to EHS.

Funding Models:

Important services merit a proportionate level of resourcing. A crucial part of resourcing is financial investment, which in turn allows municipal councils and fire departments to attract and procure the other resources necessary for effective fire prevention (i.e.: qualified human resources, equipment, fleet, infrastructure, etc.). Capital funding, support for training, and funding for day-to-day operations and equipment can all be improved in the interest of more effective fire prevention in Nova Scotia. Past reviews have suggested that paying volunteer firefighters for the time spent responding to calls will support the sustainability of volunteer fire departments. While this may be an idea that helps to address a specific problem, it would exacerbate challenges of growing costs. As identified in past reports, the financial

resources of property taxes, area rates, provincial grants, provincial transfer payments to municipalities should all be considered as ways to address these funding needs.

Municipal area rates and general levies are the primary funding sources for fire prevention services in Nova Scotia. The ever-growing demands on municipal budgets with rising costs and new downloaded responsibilities places a significant limitation on how much these primary funding sources can be relied upon. Municipalities are not able to address fire service funding needs by increasing property taxes or establishing new area rates. The RFDA enables Commissioners to establish fire service district levies or area rates that the municipality must collect and remit. In order to ensure goal-oriented and equitable funding, municipalities should be given discretion to take recommended budgets under advisement and ultimately decide how to raise and distribute the necessary funds. Province-wide standards will again be helpful for determining where funding needs lie. However, there is a risk that these standards will put prohibitive pressure on municipal budgets and operations if nothing else in the system changes.

The tradition of independent fundraising by fire departments is also a source of revenue that is not as reliable or sufficient as it once was. Therefore, identifying new sources of funding is a necessary part of modernizing fire prevention services and equipping fire departments to confront the challenges brought on by rising population and rising average temperatures. Support could be provided to establish processes for billing for fire services that are not currently captured in all jurisdictions, such as insurance claims.

In section 294(6) of the MGA/section 305(6) of the HRMC, municipalities have the legislated ability to “grant or lend money to, or guarantee a loan for, a registered fire department” and this option should remain in place. A review of fire department borrowing should be undertaken and consideration given to limiting the impact fire department debt has on the municipal debt ratio.

Additional language or regulations could also create a new source of revenue by creating a cost recovery mechanism for the provision of non-emergency services to private corporate entities, such as Nova Scotia Power.

With municipal and private funding options being limited, the additional funds necessary must come from province-wide resources. The recent Emergency Services Provider Fund is a commendable and much-needed grant-based solution that will certainly help to increase the capacity of fire departments across Nova Scotia. To support life cycle asset management and aid the fulfillment of equipment standards, such grants should be regularly available on a predictable basis and support scheduled renewal of equipment. Eligibility for grants should also be goal-oriented by prioritizing those fire departments that are most in need, which will address the concern of over-resourced fire departments and distribute funding on an equitable basis.

Given the increasing importance of fire prevention services and regional variations in the ability to secure necessary funds, the provincial government could consider introducing a Fire Services Modernization Transfer Program. A sustained provincial transfer to municipalities will help to bring all fire prevention services to up a minimum level that will align with standards. The earmarked funds distributed under this transfer program can be distributed to fire departments by municipalities in their role in ensuring compliance with standards with annual reports from these departments.

Provincial purchasing power can also help create opportunities for economies of scale and bulk purchasing programs that municipalities and fire departments can tap into, rather than purchase fleet vehicles and other equipment individually. Bulk purchasing arrangements will directly aid the fulfillment of equipment standards. The Office of the Fire Marshall could administer bulk purchasing and help to advance fire prevention services into their next generation. In the place of funding assistance, the provincial government could also help augment equipment by providing it directly as is done by Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on a seasonal basis.

Without province-wide investment and efforts to obtain economies of scale, the capacity of fire departments will continue to be determined by the local ability to finance these services. The locally-determined level of funding results in a fragmented and inconsistent level of service across the province despite the indiscriminate, province-wide threat of fire.

Organizational Structure:

Fire departments created as corporate bodies or agencies of a municipality function well as the baseline organizational structure. What is necessary to improve organizational performance is provincial standards established by the Fire Marshall and overseen by municipalities in the registration or creation of fire departments. Municipalities could aid the effective governance of fire prevention services by submitting annual reports received from fire departments to the Fire Marshall.

If conducted on the bases of evidence, provincial standards, and a priority of maintaining or improving response times, consolidation can be a useful part of modernizing fire prevention services and maximizing the return on investments of the public dollar. Opportunities for economies of scale can also be seized by consolidating fire departments, when necessary, as identified by municipal councils in their discretion under section 294(2)(a) of the MGA/305 (2)(a) of the HRMC.

In order to determine the ideal organizational structure of fire prevention services, municipalities should be supported in conducting risk assessments, jurisdictional master planning, and evaluations with training, support for professional services, and templates.

Effective public safety and fire prevention is often accomplished with partnerships. Fire departments should be incentivized to engage in community-based partnerships and with other fire departments with formalized mutual aid agreements.

Services, Supports, and Dispatching Standards:

To allow for municipal oversight of services in their jurisdiction, fire departments should be required to provide annual reports or proactive notification of changes to the services that they are able to provide.

Fire fighters help Nova Scotians during their time of greatest need, and they therefore deserve support with occupational hazards to physical and mental health when needed. In order to retain qualified staff and to compensate them for the physical and mental toll of such heroic work, fire fighters should be proactively debriefed and offered post-incident mental health supports. Mental health resources should be actively advertised and made available upon request. Supporting the physical and mental health of fire fighters will lead to a more sustainable and moral fire prevention regime. Air quality monitoring and requirements to report the types and substances involved in a fire incident is an indispensable part of improving health and safety in a risk-laden occupation.

Effective dispatch is a cornerstone of effective emergency response. There is currently a myriad of dispatch systems across the province, some so small that they augment the risk to local emergency services. Existing dispatch systems should be enhanced with improved computer-aided systems and other communication technology. A regionalized or centralized dispatch system could help to reach a uniform standard across the province, if the systems, training, and human resources necessary for quick response times and clear communication are in place. The FSSOC Report recommended a centralized dispatch system and that a centralized system would aid performance-based reporting and evaluation.

Administration and Coordination:

Some municipalities have employed Fire Service Coordinators. However, many municipalities lack the resources necessary to have this dedicated resource for fire. The Pomax Report found that some municipalities in Nova Scotia have banded together to introduce the position of fire coordinator to assist communities in the administration of fire service delivery and that these positions were of significant assistance in facilitating coordination and cooperation. The provincial government should provide assistance to all municipalities to ensure Fire Service Coordinators are conducting their important work in all municipalities.

Coordination of services will be ideally supported by risk assessments and jurisdictional plans to address these risks.

Provincial-Municipal-Volunteer Relationships:

Similar to the importance of supporting the health and well-being of fire fighters, the provincial government should expand non-ruminative incentives for these important positions to assist with recruitment and retention. This is especially important for volunteer fire departments. Augmenting local recruitment efforts for volunteer fire departments as part of establishing the Nova Scotia Guard is a timely opportunity.

There is a pressing need for coordinated approaches to human resources. As noted in the 2023 Nova Scotia Wildfires After-Action Report commissioned by the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables (DNRR), the chiefs of volunteer fire departments reported that recruitment for seasonal and provincial fire prevention services place a strain on volunteer departments: “The DNRR draw the younger and more physically abled firefighters, leaving some departments with inadequate capability to maintain their own fire services.” While this is the result of legitimate decision making by individual fire fighters, a coordinated approach is called for.

As one of the main fire prevention services partners in Nova Scotia, the provincial government has the unique ability to create laws, standards, and resources that will help other partners provide optimal levels of service. Municipalities can ensure standards are being met with their policymaking and oversight role and provide for coordination within their jurisdiction.

Standards and performance measures will empower municipalities to play their role. These standards will also provide clear and apolitical grounds for consolidation when found to be necessary or advantageous in the public interest. While legislative and regulatory changes in themselves will not lead to the political will necessary to make decisions in all cases, the changes recommended in this submission will create a more enabling and evidence-informed basis for such action.

Municipalities already have clear grounds to engage in mutual aid. With amendments to section 302 of the MGA/312 of the HRMC such inter-municipal assistance and mutual aid agreements can be improved with formalization, guidance for termination clauses, model provisions, mediation processes, asset ownership and fire commission creation.

Collaboration between fire departments and DNR is reported to work well, and this support should be increased in the form of enhanced equipment allocations and joint training opportunities.

Volunteer fire departments are often called on to provide life saving work as MFRs due to delayed responses from Emergency Health Services. This is a major inequity between a strained volunteer service and a paid services that is supposed to be the primary provider of such services. This well-known issue is an example of how investments in other provincial

services are necessary to avoid undue strain on volunteer departments, as well as composite or paid fire departments.

Finally, in advancing support and resources, it is very important to ensure equal recognition of all fire departments, be they volunteer, paid, or composite.

Concluding Remarks

Improved fire prevention services have been envisioned in review after review. This joint submission adds to the documentation of problems and proposed solutions from a municipal perspective. It is the will to make the necessary changes that will bring about lasting solutions. New challenges created by climate change and population growth exacerbate the longstanding problems of decreased volunteerism, equipment management, and funding restraints. NSFM and AMANS are happy to be part of this effort to identify pressing issues and viable solutions and encourage FSANS and the provincial government to put this knowledge into action.

To provide a clear and coordinated point of contact, there should be a central provincial body, such as the Office of the Fire Marshall, from which training requirements, equipment standards and performance measures are mandated and facilitated. As this central provincial body is being established, municipalities need to be at the table.

As has been long-identified, the missing piece of fire prevention governance and oversight in Nova Scotia is province-wide standards and performance measures. Regulatory standards and performance measures will provide a clear and sufficiently authoritative basis for municipal councils to fulfill their oversight role. Province-wide standards will help municipal councils determining the adequacy and funding needs of fire departments in their jurisdiction. However, there is a serious risk that establishing standards alone will put prohibitive pressure on already strained municipal resources.

Downloading the responsibility and cost of fire service reform to municipalities is not a viable approach. With municipal and private funding options being limited, the additional funds necessary must come from province-wide resources. Without province-wide investment and efforts to obtain economies of scale, the capacity of fire departments will continue to be determined by the local ability to finance these services. The locally determined level of funding results in a fragmented and inconsistent level of service across the province despite the indiscriminate, province-wide threat of fire.

The recent Emergency Services Provider Fund is a commendable grant-based solution that will certainly help to increase the capacity of fire departments across Nova Scotia. Given the increasing importance of fire prevention services and regional variations in the ability to fund fire prevention services, the provincial government should also consider introducing a Fire Services Modernization Transfer to municipalities. A sustained provincial transfer to municipalities will help to bring all fire prevention services to up a minimum level that will

align with standards. Provincial purchasing power can also help create opportunities for economies of scale and bulk purchasing programs that municipalities and fire departments can tap into. Bulk purchasing arrangements will directly aid the fulfillment of equipment standards.

Along with establishing a new approach to providing initial and ongoing training to fire fighters, the provincial government should also introduce training standards that will ensure a high level of fire prevention capacity and safety for fire fighters. Training resources and joint-training opportunities should be widely provided to all fire prevention partners.

Existing dispatch systems should be enhanced with improved computer-aided systems and other communication technology. A regionalized or centralized dispatch system could help to reach a uniform standard and performance-based reporting and evaluation across the province. Mutual aid agreements can be improved with formalization and assessments of legal risks to municipalities.

In addition to standards setting a baseline for municipal policies and evaluations, municipal councils should be provided with evaluation and risk assessment tools that can be applied to their respective jurisdictions. Evaluations and gap analysis can be applied in the interest of identifying training, equipment, service, and, ultimately, funding needs. Such risk assessment and fire department evaluation tools are increasingly necessary due to the impacts of climate change across the province. With provincial standards in place, these risk assessments and evaluations will provide evidence-informed and apolitical grounds for consolidating fire departments.

Aside from standards and funding, strains on the operation of fire departments could be relieved by reviewing the relationship between EHS funding and the MFR services provided by (primarily volunteer) fire departments. Further, recruitment and retention efforts can be improved by actively advertising and proactively providing mental health resources.

There are various funding and governance models for fire service in place across the province. This will be difficult to standardize as each model plays into a complex set of tax policies, service needs, and geographies in each municipality. Following this review, the provincial government must work with municipalities as part of the long-term effort required to address these challenges. NSFAM and AMANS are happy to contribute to this review and are ready to engage in the ongoing, collaborative work necessary to reach the next generation of fire prevention services in Nova Scotia.