

HB 1899 -- FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICTS

SPONSOR: Pfautsch

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Special Standing Committee on Small Business by a vote of 16 to 0.

Currently, the City of Harrisonville is required to pay a fire protection district, under Section 72.418, RSMo, an amount equal to the tax the district would have collected on all taxable property included within the annexed area, and the district must continue to provide fire protection services to the annexed area. This bill repeals this provision, with the result that the City of Harrisonville will be governed by Section 321.322, which governs the respective rights and obligations when a city with a population between 2,500 and 65,000 with a municipal fire department annexes property in a fire protection district.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that this bill will end the carve out in Cass County, improve economic activity, help grow business, and restore jobs to the city of Harrisonville in Cass County. Harrisonville lost 1,200 jobs because of the 2005 law change. Harrisonville is a community that has a Walmart distribution center. This law will benefit Harrisonville specifically. Financially, Central Cass Fire District is in a good position. The city needs to expand its boundaries to grow. Currently, a business pays for local municipal fire protection, but receives rural fire district service. The city pays the county for the services. This bill will allow the Harrisonville Municipal Fire District to grow with the city growth. There is a long standing dispute between the rural and city fire districts. Central Cass sued Harrisonville for five years of property tax payments for the land annexed. Last year the rural and city fire districts tried to work something out without any success.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Pfautsch; Steve Mauer, City of Harrisonville; and Keith Moody, City of Harrisonville.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say this bill will take away Central Cass' tax base but the fire district will still provide aid as needed to the city. Costs won't change, just the revenue will be transferred. Central Cass needs the property tax revenue to remain in place to cover its costs. Many other areas are consolidated to share the work and funding. They should consider consolidation of the two fire districts into one by vote of the people. This issue is about revenue/money. A property tax decrease for Central Cass is more of a hit than for the city. Central Cass gave mutual aid 85 times to the city and received aid from the city 37 times.

Testifying against the bill were Woody Cozad, Central Cass Fire District; Curt Huckshorn, Central Cass County Fire Chief; Fred Dreiling, Association of Water Districts; Jorgan Schlemier, Fire Service Alliance; and Raymond Hawley, Board of Directors.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say a personal conflict with someone that ended in a showdown caused the law change in 2005. Jobs were lost in Harrisonville because of the law change.

Testifying on the bill was Zerger & Mauer.