

Pennsylvania May Primary Ballot Question 4

MAKING MUNICIPAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES COMPANIES ELIGIBLE FOR LOANS

Ballot Question

Do you favor expanding the use of the indebtedness authorized under the referendum for loans to volunteer fire companies, volunteer ambulance services and volunteer rescue squads under 35 PA.C.S. §7378.1 (related to referendum for additional indebtedness) to include loans to municipal fire departments or companies that provide services through paid personnel and emergency medical services companies for the purpose of establishing and modernizing facilities to house apparatus equipment, ambulances and rescue vehicles, and for purchasing apparatus equipment, ambulances and rescue vehicles, protective and communications equipment and any other accessory equipment necessary for the proper performance of the duties of the fire companies and emergency medical services companies?

What this means (provided by LWVPA)

If you vote YES, you support expanding PA's loan program to paid municipal, as well as volunteer, fire and emergency medical services companies.

If you vote NO, you support keeping PA's loan program available to volunteer fire and emergency medical service companies and not to paid municipal fire and emergency medical services companies.

Background on proposed amendment: This constitutional amendment was referred to the ballot as an exception to the normal procedure for passing constitutional amendments. "When a major emergency threatens or is about to threaten the state" the General Assembly may refer a constitutional amendment to the ballot with a two-thirds vote of each chamber. Specifically, here, the General Assembly determined there is a need for paid municipal fire departments and emergency medical service companies to update their facilities and equipment. Under current PA law, only volunteer fire and EMS companies are authorized to apply for loans from this program. The loan program's fund for volunteer companies was last approved by PA voters at \$50,000,000 in 2002. If approved, this new law would allow paid municipal fire and emergency medical service companies to also obtain loans from the program. The State Fire Commissioner administers these loans under specified codes and regulations. This bill does not expand the amount of money in the funds nor the purposes for which the loans can be used, it only addresses expanding the eligible pool of loan applicants.

Arguments FOR:

- Provides opportunities for paid municipal fire and EMS companies to apply for loans to upgrade and replace equipment and facilities
- Increases potential for budget flexibility for municipalities to shift facility and equipment costs to personnel and other costs
- Promotes elected municipalities to upgrade and/or replace fire and EMS equipment and facilities

Arguments AGAINST:

- Increases applicant pool, and thus, the acceptance rate, for loans to upgrade and replace existing equipment and facilities for volunteer companies while not increasing the overall fixed amount of funds
- Potentially increases already existing budget constraints and recruitment of volunteer fire and EMS companies
- Expands existing oversight and demands on the State Fire Commissioner that administers and grants loans