



KENTLAND VOLUNTEER
FIRE DEPARTMENT



*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

August 10, 2007

This letter is being sent to you from the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department as an informative measure. The following explains a small portion of our history and encompasses the departments' fight to serve our local community, for free. Thank you for your time and attention. As a disclaimer, this letter is meant to tell the truth about our fire departments struggle. It is no way shape or form meant to be used to offend anyone. The following is only factual. Although this has been circulated among a vast group of public figures and media groups, we ask that you please pass this on to anyone you know.

Fifty-seven years ago, two men, Robert Baeschlin and John Wilding had a dream. That dream was to organize a form of fire protection for the rural Kentland, Maryland area. After many meetings and support from the community, they established the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department, Company 33. The charter members of this department invested copious amounts of time into making the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department a source of emergency protection that the surrounding community could entrust to save property and lives. Some of the charter members took out second mortgages on their homes just to buy fire apparatus and equipment. Within ten years, the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department had grown to be one of the most respected fire departments in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. To date, the membership of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department has and continues to, invest this type of dedication and commitment.

Prior to May 26, 1995, the then Prince George's County Fire Chief sent a letter to the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department stating that the County Career (paid) staffing that was used to supplement the volunteer membership at fire station 33 would be removed. The reasoning offered was that due to a budget shortfall, there was a need for County Career personnel elsewhere. The Kentland Volunteer Fire Department's ability to maintain a core group of volunteer members was also a reason given. On May 26 the County Career personnel left, never to return. At the time, it was said through political rumor and agenda that the removal of personnel was done in hopes that the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department would eventually fold under the volume of emergency/non-emergency calls provided by Company 33.

Since the County Career personnel have left, it has been an up-hill battle for the volunteers at fire station 33 to stay in business. Most would think that this is due to the amount of calls that fire station 33 runs per year. However, the call volume is not a significant reason for the difficulties in continuing to be a successful volunteer organization within Prince George's County, Maryland. The real struggle is not about running thousands of calls per year or of recruiting and retaining members. Instead, it is the political fight that takes place everyday for the members of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department. For the past 12 years (as an all-volunteer staffed fire station) the membership has continuously been harassed, punished for unjust reasons, and even assaulted by members of the Prince George's County Career Fire Department.

In one incident, a Career Firefighter assaulted a Kentland Volunteer member, giving him a black eye and knocking out his front tooth. Any person would think that the Career Firefighter would have been

fired or terminated, just as a Kentland Volunteer was in the past. Instead the Career Firefighter was rewarded and promoted to the supervisory role of Lieutenant, and soon after to the rank of Captain. He still holds that rank today. It has been said that the Career Captain even has the ability fill in as a Battalion Chief when the normally staffed officer is off.

On other occasions, members of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department have been the subject of incident investigations where the persons conducting the investigations are employees of the Career Department. Most of the complaints and outcomes are biased and used to supplement other political agendas in future arenas. Even the Prince George's County Fire Department's public information office is used to promote the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department to the public as a bad organization or bad people just to discredit everything that this single fire station does. Consequently, when the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department needs support it is seldom found. The Prince George's County Fire Department uses the press to promote the career division, while in turn using every chance to make the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department look like a renegade group to the rest of the general public.

Day in and day out, the membership of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department, station 33 provides more fire and EMS protection to the Kentland, Landover, Glenarden and surrounding communities than any other local fire station (career or volunteer) does to their respective communities. For the past 12 years the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department has responded to over 85,000 individual emergency and non-emergency assistance calls. Routinely, the volunteers staff more than just the required one piece of fire apparatus. At least one volunteer from fire station 33 has been presented with a legit life saving award each year since becoming all volunteer staffed. The Prince George's County Volunteer Firemen's Association has presented a member of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department with its "firefighter of the year" award more times than any other department in the County. Additionally, the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department has saved the citizens over \$68,000,000.00 in 12 years. Nonetheless, the Prince George's County Fire Department consistently lead the public to believe that the volunteers at Kentland are "out of control" or "don't care about the community they serve." Sadly, most people only believe what they hear. The volunteers at Kentland care about the community - over 20 individuals live at the fire station and they continue to provide the citizens with an outstanding service that the County Career Department says they cannot.

Five months ago, the Prince George's County Fire Department and its Fire Chief started on their next agenda to increase the workload of the volunteers at Kentland. They directed that the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department, station 33, place a Basic Life Support (EMS) transport unit in service. Using their statistics it was estimated that the ambulance, if placed in service, would run an estimated 4400 responses on top of the stations 7,500 runs annually. Although this workload seemed excessive to manage with the all volunteer force, the Kentland Fire Chief vowed complete cooperation in this matter and stated that the company (Kentland) board of directors and membership would have to approve this extra service. The Kentland Volunteer Fire Department even established an EMS task force to evaluate the impact this additional service would have on the existing operations. After two months of evaluations and hundreds of hours spent on research, the department made a unanimous decision that the Basic Life Support transport unit could not effectively be run at Station 33 for various reasons. The reasons offered included issues with space, and the risk of burnout of volunteer staffing. The County Fire Department, knowing that the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department could not undertake this extra burden without assistance, once again used the media to discredit fire station 33. The County Career Fire Department even went to such lengths as to say that "the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department refuses to provide EMS care," and "the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department refuses to provide a transport unit to the community." To the contrary, the Prince George's County Fire Department has placed three Basic Life Support transport units permanently out of service that were in the Kentland/Landover area. When it was brought to the attention of the current administration, it could only reply by saying that it was done underneath another fire chief and his administration. As this political process continued to progress, the current Fire Chief, Michael Mattison was suspended for not placing the Basic Life Support transport unit in service by the directed date, though he had no individual bearing on the decision.

In the months that followed, Deputy Fire Chief Anthony Kelleher became the recognized chief operational officer between the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department and the Prince George's County Fire Department. Chief Kelleher was presented with the same deadlines as Chief Mattison. During a two month period, Chiefs Mattison and Kelleher, with the assistance of the company board of directors and membership, established three detailed plans to assist with the placement of the Basic Life Support transport unit in the Kentland area. Each of the plans would have benefited the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department's membership and provided the directed service within the community. Not surprisingly, each one of the plans denied. The only good explanation that anyone can find is that the presented plans would not destroy the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department and its membership.

Notably, the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department has NEVER been against placing an EMS unit in service on the property of fire station 33. It has always been a matter of getting the Prince George's County Fire Department to provide staffing for it, just as forty-two of the County's forty-three Basic Life Support transport units receive every day. When this was asked for, it was offered, but only for thirty days. Afterwards, the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department would be responsible for the staffing on its own. It appears as if the Prince George's County Fire Department feels that the citizens of Landover are less worthy of two career shift people for a Basic Life Support transport unit than those in other neighborhoods.

Just last month, the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department put forth the effort to start a nation wide recruitment initiative. This was aimed not only at the fire/EMS service across the United States, but the surrounding community. The Kentland Volunteer Fire Department was also using this to see exactly how easy it would be to obtain members interested in EMS operations with a call volume as great as fire station 33 for no compensation. After two and a half weeks of steady looking, only a small handful had come forward—once again leading the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department to believe that the burnout effect on volunteers would be tremendous, especially when taking on 100% of the workload.

Presently, the Prince George's County Fire Department continues to put more and more strain on the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department with no relief from public figures, representatives, County Council members, etc. The Prince George's County Fire Department is attempting to crush the volunteers and they are being allowed to proceed with this vendetta. In some instances, they are even going outside their authority and violating personal rights. As of this day, the County Fire Department's Fire Chief, Lawrence Sedgwick, Jr., and his direct subordinates have taken Station Management funding and withheld State funding from the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department—all because the department has agreed to place an ambulance in service, but with County Career personnel. This means that the department is without approximately \$75,000.00 of funding it uses to operate. Kentland Fire Chief Michael Mattison is still suspended and unable to even ride on fire apparatus as a firefighter. For a volunteer possessing as much pride and commitment as one does from the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department, being suspended and unable to provide service to the community is life altering.

As of August 7, 2007, Fire Chief Lawrence Sedgwick, Jr. has set yet another deadline. This deadline states that Deputy Fire Chief Anthony Kelleher is directed to place the Basic Life Support transport unit in service by August 20, 2007 at 0700 hours. During the first thirty days, County Career personnel would be provided to staff the unit alone. As of September 19, 2007, the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department would be solely responsible for all staffing of the unit. Basically, the same as was first directed over five months ago. This is positive proof that the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department has progressively worked toward providing a Basic Life Support transport service while the Prince George's County Fire Department has provided nothing but directives, suspensions and the removal of funding.

With this new directive and no cooperation from the Prince George's County Fire Department and its Chief, the weeks ahead hold a lot of uncertainty for the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department. There is a possibility that Deputy Fire Chief Anthony Kelleher will be suspended for not placing the Basic Life Support transport unit in service on August 20, 2007. This would mean that a decorated member of the department won't be able to do what he loves, which is to provide service to the Landover Community. It is also rumored that the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department will be restricted to its first due area only.

This means that the Engine Company (pumper with water, EMS), Ladder Company (truck with ladders for high reach, EMS) and Heavy Rescue Company (technical rescue, jaws of life, EMS) will not be allowed to respond outside of their immediate response area to help the citizens, even if help has to go past fire station 33 and is double and even triple the distance. Just this week, Kentland's Ladder Truck responded as far away as Oxon Hill, Maryland (14 miles) twice to provide service. If restricted to the first due response area, units might have come from other counties nearly 25 miles away. However, the only people that will continue to suffer are the citizens of Prince George's County.

It is hard for any member of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department to imagine why it is this much of a battle just to provide service to the community for free. Each and every day, dedicated individuals fight just to ride on emergency apparatus with no monetary compensation. The members of the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department and every volunteer fire company in Prince George's County should never have to put forth this much effort to serve their fellow citizen and ride emergency vehicles for FREE! Someone needs to stand up for what is right and it needs to happen now. All that the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department asks for is fair and equal treatment, not suspensions and penalties for doing what is in our hearts and not in our pockets. Sadly, we will most likely have to resort to litigating for what is right, taking even more funding from the volunteer fire departments and the Prince George's County Fire Department is aware of this. We just want to help our community... and that's the bottom line.

BELOW IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE WORK PUT INTO A BASIC LIFE SUPPORT TRANSPORT UNIT FROM BOTH SIDES:

Kentland:

- ☐ Provided land for a temporary EMS building with intent of a permanent building.
- ☐ Offered to build a living facility and vehicle storage area with Kentland funds.
- ☐ Offered to establish a Kentland Volunteer EMS agency and oversee the operation.
- ☐ Performed a nationwide volunteer recruitment initiative.
- ☐ Fully cooperated with the County Fire Department on all requests
- ☐ Offered to accept BLS transport unit with dedicated two dedicated career staff around the clock permanently.
- ☐ Offered three plans to provide service to the community with a BLS transport unit.

County Fire Department:

- ☐ Offered eight career firefighters (our request) at a community meeting and then retracted the statement at the next meeting.
- ☐ Offered four career firefighters (during daytime hours) for 30 days.
- ☐ Offered two career firefighters (24 hour shift) for 30 days.
- ☐ Suspended Fire Chief Michael Mattison.
- ☐ Took away "Station Management" funding (approx. \$30,000.00).
- ☐ Moving to take away "508, state funding" (approx. \$45,000.00).
- ☐ Threatening to restrict Kentland VFD units to only their first due response area.

Cc: President George W. Bush, Commander and Chief, United States of America
The Honorable Martin O'Malley, Governor, State of Maryland
The Honorable Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor, State of Maryland
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Senator, State of Maryland (faxed)
The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin, Senator, State of Maryland (faxed)
The Honorable Wayne T. Gilchrest, Representative, State of Maryland, 1st Cong. Dist. (faxed)
The Honorable C.A. Ruppersberger, Representative, State of Maryland, 2nd Cong. Dist. (faxed)
The Honorable Albert R. Wynn, Congressman, State of Maryland, 4th Cong. Dist. (faxed)

Cont. Cc:

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer, Representative, State of Maryland, 5th Cong. Dist. (faxed)
The Honorable Roscoe G. Bartlett, Representative, State of Maryland, 6th Cong. Dist. (faxed)
The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Representative, State of Maryland, 7th Cong. Dist. (faxed)
The Honorable Christopher Van Hollen, Jr., Representative, State of Maryland, 8th Cong. Dist.
The Honorable Nathaniel Exum, Senator, State of Maryland, District 24
The Honorable Carolyn J. B. Howard, Delegate, District 24
The Honorable Joanne C. Benson, Delegate, State of Maryland, District 24 (faxed)
The Honorable Douglas J.J. Peters, Senator, State of Maryland, District 23
The Honorable Barack Obama, Senator, State of Illinois, Presidential Candidate Hopefull (faxed)
The Honorable Jack B. Johnson, County Executive, Prince George's County, Maryland
The Honorable Mike Herman, Chief of Staff, Prince George's County, Maryland
Vernon R. Herron, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Public Safety/ Dir. H.S.
The Honorable Camille A. Exum, Chairman, Prince George's County Council
The Honorable David C. Harrington, Vice Chairman, Prince George's County Council
The Honorable Gail Carter, Mayor, City of Glenarden
Wade Braithwaite, Chief of Police, City of Glenarden
Charlotte Underwood, Kentland Civic Assoc.
The Honorable Theresa M. Dudley, Community Activist, Resident, Kentland, MD.
Paul R. Balta, President, Maryland State Firemen's Association
Paul Sterling Jr., 1st Vice President, Maryland State Firemen's Association
Frank Underwood, 2nd Vice President, Maryland State Firemen's Association
Danny Davis, Legislative Office, Maryland State Firemen's Association
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Various other community residents, assoc. and representatives