FACT SHEET

Support for Fire Protection Services Act

Why the Support for Fire Protection Services Act Is Needed

Over the past year, we've taken a hard, honest look at the state of fire services across the province. These changes reflect the recommendations coming out of the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia's (FSANS) governance review last year.

The problem

- Fire services across Nova Scotia are inconsistent.
- There's a patchwork of funding, training standards, governance models, and service levels.
- Firefighters raised concerns about safety, training quality, and lack of oversight.

What informed the changes

The Province introduced the Support for Fire Protection Services Act on Monday, February 23 to strengthen fire services across Nova Scotia. The legislation is part of the Province's ongoing commitment to strengthening the fire services sector.

- A governance review by the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS).
- Input from 700+ fire chiefs, deputies, municipal leaders, coordinators, and commissioners.
- A Value-For-Money Audit of the Nova Scotia Firefighter School (NSFS) identified serious safety and governance issues.

What firefighters said they want

- Better governance and oversight
- Safer, standardized training
- More consistent service delivery across the province

What the Act Does

The legislation

- The *Support for Fire Protection Services Act* (Bill 186) was introduced February 23, 2026.

- It strengthens the fire service system without forcing major structural changes immediately.

Key goals

- Improve consistency, safety, and coordination.
- Support municipalities and fire services.
- Modernize fire services over time, in an informed manner.

Governance & Oversight Changes

Office of the Fire Commissioner (New)

- A new Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) will be created.
    - This is recommended by FSANS.
- Provides a single "home in government" for fire safety and fire services, oversight and leadership.

What the Fire Commissioner will do

- Set provincewide standards (through regulations)
- Provide direction and oversight for fire services
- Lead training and certification reforms
- Coordinate with municipalities and fire services

How the Fire Commissioner will be chosen

- Hired through a competitive public process
- Appointed under the *Civil Service Act*

Responsibilities of the Province vs. Municipalities

What's changing

- Responsibility for the *Fire Safety Act* and *Rural Fire District Act* moves to the Minister of Emergency Management.
- The Province will set the provincial standards for:
    - Fire services
    - Training and certification
    - Personal protective equipment
    - Fire service planning and reporting
    - Transition support for municipal models

What's NOT changing

This legislation does not change section 293 of the *Municipal Government Act*. Municipalities may maintain and provide fire and emergency services but will not be required to do so.

- Municipalities are not required to provide fire services ("may" does not become "shall").
- Existing fire commissions, brigades, associations, and volunteer societies stay as they are.
- Wildland firefighters (DNR) are not affected.

Fire Service Reviews & Risk Assessments

Who must do them

- All municipalities (even if they don't run fire services)
- Fire service providers, including commissions

What reviews include

- Community risk assessments
- Evidence-based decisions on service levels
- Alignment of training, competencies, and equipment with local risk

Support from the Province

- A free, standardized risk assessment tool
- Training on how to use the tool
- Local expertise leads the assessment

Training, Certification & Standards

Training model

- Move toward regional training (not one central school).
- Hub-and-spoke model:
    - Advanced and command training centrally
    - Basic training delivered locally

Investments already made

- Two mobile burn units

- Four propane fuelled training props
- Planned regional training facilities through partnerships

Firefighter certification

- Level 1 certification is NOT mandatory
- Firefighters can choose roles:
    - Exterior (defensive)
    - Interior (offensive)
    - Support roles
- Training will be role appropriate and flexible
- Online and in-person (“hybrid”) delivery

NFPA standards

- NFPA standards are not automatically adopted
- Nova Scotia–specific standards will be developed over three years
- Local capacity and realities will be factored in

Support for Municipalities

If municipalities want to move to a municipally led fire service model, they can access:

- Transition funding
- Shared procurement and insurance options
- Tools and templates (maps, service agreements, risk tools)
- A province-wide Fire Records Management System

Training supports

- Fire Training Advisory Committee (FTAC)
- Regional and interim training plans
- Reduced barriers to recognized training
- Work toward easier access to Class 3 licenses

Funding & Fundraising

Bill 186 does not change how fire services are funded in Nova Scotia.

- Funding models vary widely from community-to-community and across fire service organization types, services offered, and the involvement of municipalities.

- There is no one uniform/standard approach to funding fire services.
- Fire services are primarily paid for through a combination of municipal taxation, area rates and levies paid by users within a given service boundary, through grant funding, and fundraising such as the 50-50 Lottery and other charitable donations.

What's not changing

- Funding models remain mixed and local
- Fundraising (e.g., 50/50s) continues

What will improve

- In municipally led services, standardized equipment may reduce the need to fundraise for basics (like breathing apparatus).
- Province committed $3M this year to strengthening fire services.
- Additional funding decisions will come as modernization progresses.

Transition funding

- Available to municipalities and fire service providers that want to modernize and align with municipal leadership models.

Timeline

The Act received Royal Assent on April 9, 2026.

- It is in force immediately.

DEM"s Priorities Over the Next 3 Years:

- Establish the Office of the Fire Commissioner
- Develop standards and regulations
- Build municipal and sector capacity
- Support gradual transition to modern service delivery

What This Means Overall (In Plain Terms)

- Clear leadership and better coordination
- Consistent standards that support firefighter safety
- Risk-based planning that reflects local needs
- Phased change, guided by engagement and feedback
- Focus on safety, consistency, and support
- Changes happen with firefighters and municipalities, not to them