

Bill 186: *An Act to Provide Support for Fire Protection Services*

FEBRUARY 27, 2026

DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT



Our Vision

Every Nova Scotian has access to reliable, evidence-based fire services—no matter where they live.

Every firefighter has access to the training and equipment needed to stay safe while serving their communities.

Who We've Engaged

FSANS Governance and Administration Review (2025)

- Review of half a dozen previous reports/recommendations on fire services and governance over two decades
- 390 fire service representatives attended community-based workshops
- 400 fire service representatives completed FSANS survey
- 30 group sessions were also held with provincial government departments, fire and emergency management professionals, etc.
- Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia (AMANS)

NSFS Value for Money Audit (2025)

- 680 firefighters
- 52 fire service leaders
- 8 members of the Board of Directors of the NSFS

Fire Service Modernization Planning Sessions (2026)

- 700 fire chiefs, deputy chiefs, fire service coordinators, and municipal leaders to determine how best to implement the recommendations from the FSANS report.
- 15 sessions held online and in multiple locations including Springhill, Baddeck, Sydney, Yarmouth, and Bridgewater

What We Heard - FSANS and the Value for Money Audit

- ▶ FSANS Governance Review identified governance gaps, inconsistent training, and uneven service levels province-wide.
- ▶ A value-for-money audit of the Nova Scotia Firefighters School showed troubling safety issues, governance failures, and a lack of oversight.
- ▶ Sector-wide concerns regarding inconsistent standards, patchwork funding, recruitment/retention challenges, and inequitable access to training and equipment.
- ▶ Municipalities and fire service leaders broadly expressed the need for:
 - Better and clearer governance
 - Safe, standardized, and accessible training
 - Consistent service levels across the province

What We Heard – Recent Planning Sessions

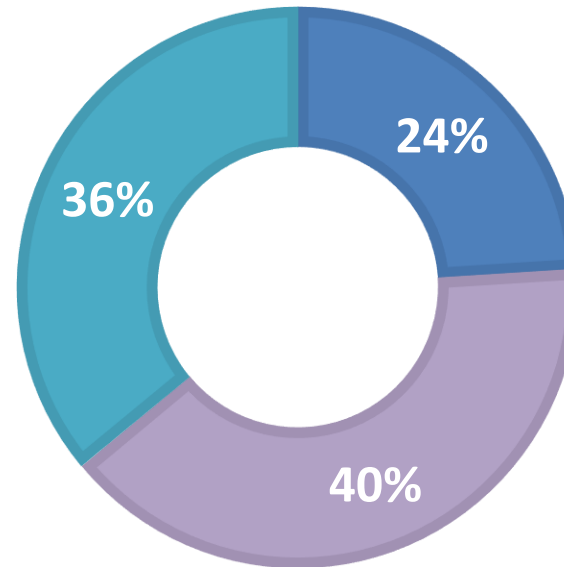
- General support for **standardized provincial frameworks, clearer roles, and sustainable long-term funding**, with concerns about equity between rural and urban departments.
- **Strong backing for NFPA-aligned training**, though access is limited by travel, facilities, and instructor availability; preference for regional, mobile, and hybrid delivery models.
- **Mixed reactions to FSANS recommendation for a new model where municipalities must lead fire service provision** with each group sharing unique questions and concerns about implementation.
- **Emphasis on firefighter wellness and volunteer retention**, highlighting burnout, administrative burden, equipment inequities, and the importance of employer/family support.
- **Municipal administrators support modernization if accompanied by predictable provincial funding**, stronger governance/oversight, and accessible training options.
- **Improved accountability and oversight was the most commonly cited benefit of a new model.**
- **While consensus on a new governance model was not reached, many participants expressed keen interest in being engaged in decision-making and using education to support change.**

New Legislation (Bill 186)

- On February 23, the Province introduced the [Support for Fire Protection Services Act](#), which will strengthen fire services across Nova Scotia
- This legislation sets the stage for a phased approach to change (e.g., standards, evidence-driven levels of service) that is both achievable and sustainable
- These changes are intended to strengthen the vital services provided by municipalities and diverse fire service providers including associations and commissions
- Aligns to some FSANS Governance Review recommendations in key thematic areas of importance to the fire service sector

FSANS GOVERNANCE REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

- Included in Bill 186
- Operational Activity Already in Progress
- Under consideration



- ✓ 32 Recommendations Accepted and Addressed by the Province
- ✓ Total = 50 Recommendations

Theme	FSANS Recommendations for Improvement	Integrated in Bill 186
Governance & Legislation	Consider aligning oversight under one provincial ministry reporting with a Fire Commissioner reporting to the DM.	✓
	Standardize definitions (Firefighter, Fire chief).	✓
Administration & Coordination	Consider creating a single executive position to provide centralized oversight and serve as the main contact for municipal fire departments.	✓
Dispatch & Communications	Ensure comprehensive records management systems, processes and performance analytics functionality to inform effective community risk assessments.	✓
Professional Standards & Training	Establish comprehensive, standardized provincial training standards based on the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards.	✓
Health, Safety & Wellness	Establish standardized fire service PPE and equipment standards.	✓
	Proactive mental health and resilience education/support.	✓
	Work with FSANS to create a drivers certification process making it easier to obtain a license to safely operate a fire apparatus.	✓
Data, Reporting & KPIs	Mandate annual reporting requirements for all fire departments to inform service levels.	✓
Risk-Based Planning	Require municipalities to maintain community risk assessments to inform service levels.	✓
	Province must ensure comprehensive records management system, processes and performance analytics functionality are in place to inform effective community risk assessments.	✓
Implementation Roadmap	Implement a staged approach to adoption.	✓

Theme	FSANS Recommendations for Improvement	Operational Activity Underway
Dispatch & Communications	Implement a consolidated, province-wide dispatch system.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Facilitate and enable the implementation of NG911.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Professional Standards & Training	Create a centralized and accessible Provincial Fire Training School.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Mobile training schools to reach all fire departments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Offer online and other distance-education models.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Create an effective “grandparenting” process for experienced fire fighters.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Provide training for all senior municipal administrators and elected officials to establish province-wide clarity of governance following each provincial election.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Health, Safety & Wellness	With appropriate cleaning and decontamination resources.
Access to proactive PTSD support.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Funding & Financial Sustainability	Collaborate with municipalities to develop funding models for fire departments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Make grant funding available to municipalities to conduct risk assessments relating to consolidation of fire departments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Explore bulk purchasing of equipment.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Recruitment & Retention (Volunteers)	Explore opportunities to enhance collaboration with the NS Guard.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Explore incentives to retain volunteers.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interoperability & Mutual Aid	Strengthen DNR collaboration on wildland fire services to improve fire safety and operational efficiency.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Explore opportunities for expanded cross-training through collaboration.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Implementation Roadmap	0-6 mo: preparation 6-18 mo: transition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	18-36 mo: implementation Develop a comprehensive change-management and communications plan to support implementation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Key Changes Introduced by the Legislation

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- ▶ Transfers oversight for fire safety and fire services to the Minister of Emergency Management
- ▶ Transfers responsibility for the *Fire Safety Act* and *Rural Fire District Act* to the Department of Emergency Management
- ▶ Establishes the authorities of the Fire Commissioner

Key Changes to Firefighter Training

- ▶ The Act enables the Fire Commissioner to regulate training programs, which must be accredited by the Fire Commissioner, or a recognized accreditation body
- ▶ The Fire Commissioner may suspend or revoke training program accreditations for non-compliance



New Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC)

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- ▶ This Act creates the OFC as a home in government to provide oversight of all aspects of fire safety and services.
- ▶ The OFC will:
 - ▶ Expand the Province's mandate for fire safety by complementing the current work of the Office of the Fire Marshal through three strategic areas of work:
 - ▶ Investigations & Compliance
 - ▶ Training & Certification
 - ▶ Legislation, Policy, and Municipal Relations
 - ▶ Oversee personal protective equipment standards
 - ▶ Provide transition support for fire departments interested in moving to a municipal model

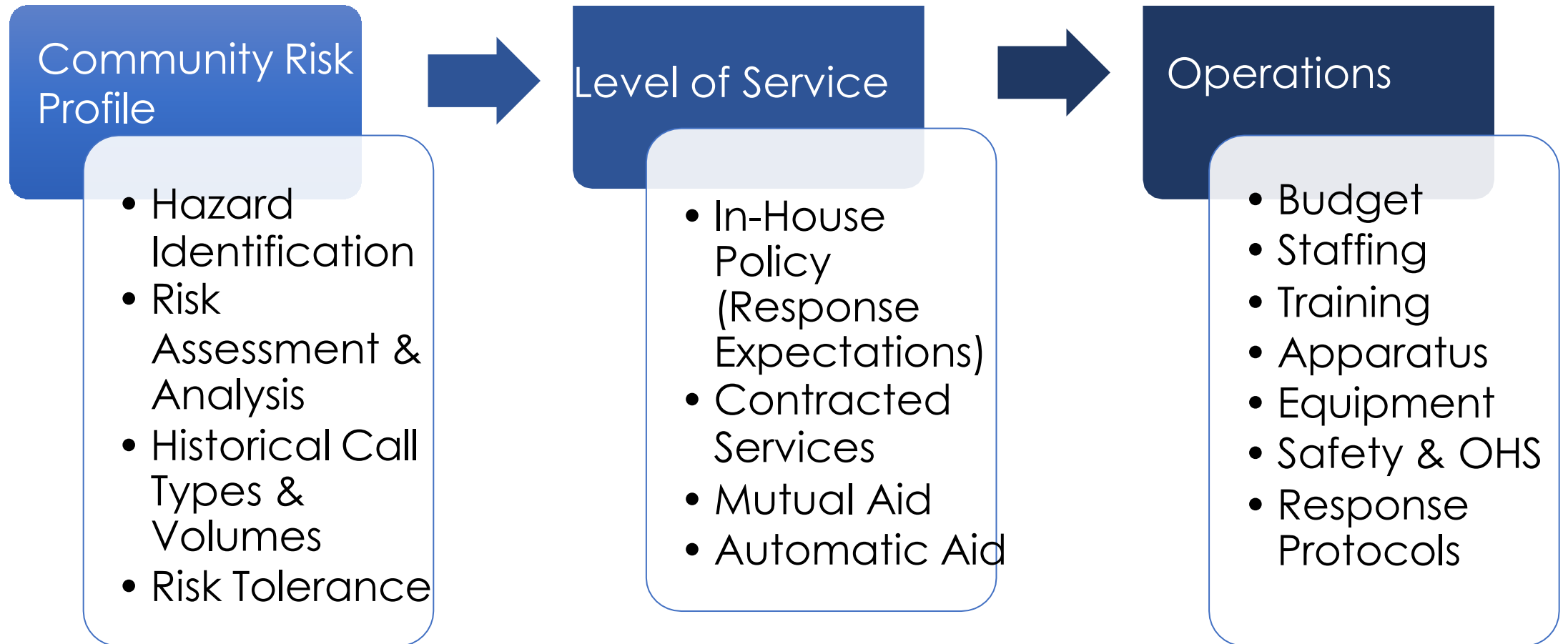
What Is Not Changing

- ▶ The vital role that firefighters and fire service leaders play in their communities is 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.
- ▶ Diverse fire service provider organizations such as fire commissions, association, brigades and departments will remain as they are—governance structures are not being changed at this time.
- ▶ Volunteer firefighters that provide services through diverse organizations will not be not become municipal employees.

New Municipal & Fire Service Provider Responsibilities

- ▶ Although municipalities are not required to provide fire services, the Act creates new responsibilities for all municipalities and fire service providers, including fire commissions and brigades:
 - ▶ Conduct a fire protection service review using a risk-based assessment
 - ▶ Ensure local competencies and PPE meet provincial standards
 - ▶ Participate in a common fire service management system (also known as the FRMS)

FIRE SERVICE REVIEW AND PLANNING INFORMED BY RISK BASED ASSESSMENTS



Community Risk Assessment

Specific profiles are reviewed to determine risk landscape



Geographic



Demographic



Economic



Heavy Industry



Building Stock



Critical Infrastructure



Public Safety Response



Transportation



Natural Occurring Emergencies



Human-Caused Emergencies

Training & Standards Aligned with Level of Service

- ▶ Whichever service is selected using risk-based assessments during the review process, a corresponding training Ensures all fire departments are training similar for each service offered
- ▶ Ensures all fire departments are training similar for each service offered
- ▶ Will enable more training regionally and provincially as standards are same for each department

Upcoming Provincial Work to Strengthen Fire Services

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- ▶ Operationalizing the Office of the Fire Commissioner
- ▶ Rolling out provincewide training and building regional training capacity
- ▶ Developing new standards and regulations in consultation with municipalities
- ▶ Supporting municipalities transitioning to a municipal model by implementing shared procurement for equipment, insurance, and vehicles to reduce costs for fire departments
- ▶ Continuing to build on FSANS recommendations in areas such as dispatch, firefighter health and wellness, volunteer recruitment and retention, mutual aid, and interoperability
- ▶ Building capacity to continue modernizing the fire service system by providing:
 - Fire service maps and service agreement templates
 - Uniform risk assessment tools to help inform fire service reviews and service planning
 - A Fire Records Management System
 - Support for regional training centres and hybrid training delivery

Moving Forward, Together

- ▶ We look forward to continuing our work with municipalities and the fire service sector to build a modernized fire service system that better serves Nova Scotians.
- ▶ We want to continue hearing from you. If you have questions or feedback, please email firemodernization@novascotia.ca