

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6548

As Passed Senate, February 14, 2018

Title: An act relating to establishing the joint legislative task force on fire service administration.

Brief Description: Establishing the joint legislative task force on fire service administration.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Palumbo and Van De Wege).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 1/31/18, 2/02/18 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 2/14/18, 48-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed First Substitute Bill

- Creates a joint legislative task force on fire service administration.
- Requires the task force to: (1) review and assess the current emergency response service structure and responsibilities, (2) request participation and consult with certain federal agencies, (3) give due consideration to the natural resources' wildland fire protection strategic plan in preparing its report, and (4) submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2019, with recommendations.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6548 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Miloscia, Ranking Member; Saldaña and Zeiger.

Staff: Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: Emergency Management. The Washington Military Department Emergency Management Division (EMD) under the direction of the adjutant general administers the state's comprehensive program of emergency management. Each political subdivision of the state must establish or jointly create a local organization for carrying out emergency management functions in accordance with the State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. In the event of a disaster beyond local control, the Governor, through the adjutant general, may assume operational control over all or any part of emergency management functions in the state.

Fire Protection Service Providers. State law authorizes the creation of several types of fire protection and emergency service providers to address the varying needs of cities, towns, counties and the state as determined by demographic factors, geography, and other regional differences. The primary types of fire protection service providers include: city or town fire departments; fire protection districts; regional fire protection service authorities; and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Fire protection providers provide firefighting services within their jurisdiction and have no obligation to respond outside of their jurisdiction. DNR has direct charge and responsibility over all matters relating to forest fire services in the state.

Fire Mobilization. When a local jurisdiction needs assistance beyond the capabilities of local resources and mutual agreements, a request may be made for mobilization of all risk resources through the Washington State Fire Service Mobilization Plan for approval by the chief of the Washington State Patrol. Once a state mobilization is declared, all state and local agencies that participate in a mobilization generally receive reimbursement through the state's Disaster Response Account.

Summary of Engrossed First Substitute Bill: A joint legislative task force on fire service administration is created.

Members of the task force include:

- two members from the House of Representatives;
- two members from the Senate;
- members representing each of the following organizations:
 - the Washington State Patrol;
 - the Washington Military Department;
 - the Department of Natural Resources;
 - the Washington State Council of Firefighters;
 - the Washington Fire Chiefs;
 - the Washington State Firefighters' Association;
 - the Washington Fire Commissioners Association;
 - the Association of Washington Cities;
 - the Washington Association of Counties;
 - the Washington federally recognized Indian Tribes;
 - the Washington environmental proponents;
 - timber interests;
 - private fire contractors;
 - the state ethnic and diversity commissions; and

- one member representing the Washington Forest Practices Board, appointed by the Governor.

The task force must choose its co-chairs from among its legislative membership. The legislative membership must convene the initial meeting of the task force no later than July 1, 2018, and have at least four meetings.

The task force must: (1) review and assess the current structure and responsibilities for providing fire and nonpolice emergency response services within Washington State and in other western states; (2) give due consideration to the natural resources' wildland fire protection strategic plan in preparing its report; (3) request the participation of and consult with the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the United States Parks Service; and (4) make recommendations:

- for improving the structure and efficiency of Washington's response administration and hierarchy;
- on establishing fire protection for areas that do not have any protection;
- on regionalizing and consolidating fire protection jurisdictions;
- about the adequacy and stability of fire service funding; and
- related to the adequacy of existing communication systems.

A report must be submitted to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2019. A minority report may also be submitted along with the task force's report if requested by any task force member.

Staff support must be provided by Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research. The expenses of the task force must be paid jointly by the Senate and the House of Representatives upon approval by the Senate Facilities and Operations Committee and the House Executive Rules Committee.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: Yes.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: It has become apparent that the state should look at fire service in Washington state. Last year there was a bill to look at fire incident fire reporting system but it was found out that it had been eliminated in cuts by the Governor. That system informs the state on what the fire problem is and how to respond to it, but it hasn't been available for 6 years because the WSP stopped receiving and storing the data due to the cuts. There are a number of issues with the recent wildfire seasons where the response seems piecemeal. There is a lot of legislation regarding wildland fire response and it seems a workgroup to review these issues and come up with solutions is the correct approach.

OTHER: Fire season falls right in the middle of the short time to conduct this research and aligns with another emergency workgroup being established under SB 6036 that has the same deadline. The Emergency Management Division has limited resources and supporting both task forces during this time would be difficult. An implementation date in 2019 would allow for more preparation and a quality product.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Geoff Simpson, Washington State Council Of Fire Fighters; Seamus Petrie, Washington Public Employees Association.

OTHER: Robert Ezelle, Emergency Management Director, Washington Military Department.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.