H-2428.1

HOUSE BILL 2104

State of Washington 69th Legislature 2026 Regular Session

By Representatives Dent, Springer, Ryu, Engell, Low, Simmons, Richards, Barnard, Keaton, Reed, Dye, Reeves, Shavers, McClintock, Thai, and Graham

Prefiled 12/08/25. Read first time 01/12/26. Referred to Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources.

AN ACT Relating to aviation assurance funding in response to wildland fires; amending 2023 c 457 s 1 (uncodified); and repealing 2023 c 457 s 5 (uncodified).

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

Sec. 1. 2023 c 457 s 1 (uncodified) is amended to read as follows:

(1) Local and tribal fire departments in the state of Washington serve as frontline responders to wildland fires. The fire chief of each local fire department with jurisdiction over wildland fires is tasked with making rapid decisions, especially during the summer months when weather conditions can cause fires to rapidly enlarge. Flashy fuels, especially during times of low humidity, can be ignited by a single spark and erupt into a rapidly moving incident that can quickly destroy rangelands, ripe dryland crops, and timberlands.

(2) Local fire departments need immediate access to local aviation resources that are certified to fly and drop fire retardants and water to suppress or extinguish wildland fires quickly. The use of aviation assets has proven to be a valuable tool to prevent many wildland fires from growing large and requiring the response of state mobilization and prevent the deployment of state and federal fire agencies and their mobilization partner agencies.

(3) Further, the strategic use of aviation assets in initial attack, or at times when conditions on the ground may warrant additional air support, can prevent fires from becoming uncontrollable. Local fire departments that use aviation assets on initial attack can prevent most fires from requiring a state mobilization. Providing financial assurances for local fire departments to deploy aviation assets ((~~will provide~~)) provides greater protection to our state's natural resources, air quality, and communities.

(4) The legislature finds that the pilot program for local aviation resources enacted in 2023 has created valuable efficiencies in the wildland fire response framework. Strengthening initial response options can benefit both local jurisdictions and provide cost savings to the state. The legislature intends to build upon the success of this initial effort by removing the expiration date, thereby making the program permanent.

(5) The legislature intends to continue to provide suppression funding to the department of natural resources to support local fire departments in the use of aviation resources certified and trained to operate in wildland fires and drop fire retardant or water to suppress or extinguish fires as an initial attack strategy. Deployment and air operations command ((~~will be~~)) are conducted at the direction of trained air operations commanders.

((~~(5)~~)) (6) The legislature intends to continue to authorize the department of natural resources to provide aviation resources to local fire departments statewide for use during the initial attack of wildland fires in order to provide assurance that local fire departments will have sufficient financial capacity to effectively control wildland fires throughout the length of the fire season. Having assurance that local fire departments can afford to use aircraft under conditions that would warrant their use and at the discretion of the local fire department chief ((~~will incentivize~~)) incentivizes the use of aircraft more quickly in order to rapidly suppress the fire and minimize damage to lands, resources, and structures, while protecting regional air quality.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** 2023 c 457 s 5 (uncodified) is repealed.

--- END ---