

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2823

As Reported by House Committee On: Ways & Means

Title: An act relating to permitting retired participants to resume volunteer firefighter, emergency worker, or reserve officer service.

Brief Description: Permitting retired participants to resume volunteer firefighter, emergency worker, or reserve officer service.

Sponsors: Representatives Kristiansen, Armstrong, Blake and Kelley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Ways & Means: 2/3/10, 2/8/10 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Permits retired volunteer firefighters that are at least age 65 and have been collecting a pension for at least three months to resume volunteer firefighting.
- Requires local governments allowing a retired firefighter to resume participation in volunteer firefighting to conduct annual medical exams of the retired volunteers and pay additional annual charges to the Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension System for the increased cost of medical and relief coverage of the retired participant volunteer firefighters.
- Prohibits retired participants who choose to resume volunteer service from becoming eligible for disability payments in the event that the retired participant becomes disabled as the result the performance of his or her duties.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 22 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Ericks, Vice Chair; Sullivan, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dammeier, Assistant Ranking Minority Member;

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.

Chandler, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Pettigrew, Priest, Ross, Schmick and Seaquist.

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Background:

The Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension System (Volunteer Fire System) provides death, disability, medical, and retirement benefits to volunteer firefighters and reserve officers in cities, towns, and fire protection districts. The Volunteer Fire System is funded by member and employer contributions and a portion of the fire insurance premium tax.

Employers are required to participate in the death, disability, and medical benefit plans (collectively referred to as the relief benefits) offered by the Volunteer Fire System, but participation in the pension component is optional. Around 18,000 members are covered by the death, disability, and medical benefits, and 12,000 members are covered by the pension benefits.

Relief benefits are available to members covered under the relief provisions of the Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension Act injured in the performance of duty. Eligibility for pension benefits from the Volunteer Fire System begin after 10 years of service. The amount of the pension vested increases for each five years of service beyond the minimum 10 years and for payments made into the pension portion of the Volunteer Fire System. The maximum pension is vested with 25 years of service and 25 payments into the pension fund. Full retirement benefits are available at age 65, and early retirement benefits are available to members with 25 years of service on an actuarially reduced basis beginning at age 60. The maximum pension benefit is \$300 per month.

Summary of Bill:

Retired volunteer firefighters that are at least age 65 and have been collecting a pension for at least three months are permitted to resume volunteer firefighting. Retired participants who choose to resume volunteer service are not eligible for disability payments in the event that the retired participant becomes disabled as the result of the performance of his or her duties. Local governments must require retired firefighters to submit to annual medical exams and pay additional annual charges to the Volunteer Fire System for the increased cost of medical and relief coverage of the retired participant volunteer firefighters.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is a good little bill. Today at age 65 volunteer firefighters must choose to stop volunteering or forego benefits. This change is not supposed to impact contribution rates to the system in any way. We do expect that a small number of people will be able to pass the physical exams and continue to serve as volunteers under the provisions of the bill.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Ryan Spiller, Washington Fire Commissioners Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.