

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2823

As of February 25, 2010

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: Passed House: 2/16/10, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/25/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Erik Sund (786-7454)

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 ten years of service. The amount of the pension vested increases for each five years of service beyond the minimum ten 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.

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.

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.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Volunteer fire fighters provide about 70 percent of statewide fire fighting and first response services. There are never enough volunteers for this valuable service, but this bill would help by enabling rural communities to retain the services of some of their most experienced volunteer fire fighters. The assumptions used in the fiscal note greatly exaggerate the potential impact of this legislation. We will ensure that the system is well funded.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Ryan Spiller, Washington Fire Commissioners; Tammie Wamke, Washington State Fire Fighters' Association.