

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1271

As Passed House:

March 11, 2025

Title: An act relating to early deployment of state fire service resources.

Brief Description: Permitting early deployment of state fire service resources.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Nance, Dent, Marshall, Bronoske, Leavitt, Salahuddin, Ryu, Davis, Mena, Ramel, Dye, Barkis, Klicker, Reed, Ormsby, Scott, Eslick, Parshley, Taylor, Kloba, Timmons, Peterson, Richards, Simmons, Hunt and Hill).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans: 1/24/25, 1/31/25 [DP];
Appropriations: 2/26/25, 2/28/25 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/11/25, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows the Chief of the Washington State Patrol to mobilize jurisdictions and request resources to prepare for an emergency or disaster situation or when an emergency or disaster is predicted to exceed local resource capabilities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & VETERANS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Kloba, Vice Chair; Barnard, Ranking Minority Member; Cortes, Keaton, Paul, Penner, Shavers, Simmons, Thomas and Volz.

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Staff: Martha Wehling (786-7067).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Couture, Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Penner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schmick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Burnett, Caldier, Callan, Corry, Cortes, Doglio, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Keaton, Leavitt, Manjarrez, Marshall, Peterson, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Springer, Stonier, Street, Thai and Tharinger.

Staff: Sydney Jeffrey (786-7303).

Background:

During an emergency, when a local jurisdiction needs assistance beyond the capabilities of local resources and mutual aid agreements, a request may be made for a state mobilization. The Chief of the Washington State Patrol (WSP) has the authority to mobilize jurisdictions under the Washington State Fire Services Mobilization Plan (Mobilization Plan). During a mobilization, fire departments, fire districts, and regional fire protection service authorities provide resources to respond to natural or man-made incidents. When available local resource capabilities are exceeded, the resources from other fire departments, fire districts, and regional fire protection service authorities must be requested. If those resources are available, the resources are required to be sent to an emergency or disaster situation.

The purpose of the Mobilization Plan is to provide a mechanism and process to quickly notify, assemble, and deploy fire service personnel and equipment to any local fire jurisdiction in Washington that has expended or will expend all available local and mutual aid resources in attempting to manage fires, disasters, or other events that jeopardize the ability of a jurisdiction to provide for the protection of life and property. The State Fire Marshal in the WSP serves as the state fire resources coordinator when the Mobilization Plan is mobilized.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Chief of the WSP may mobilize jurisdictions under the Washington State Fire Services Mobilization Plan to prepare for an emergency or disaster situation or when an emergency or disaster situation is predicted to exceed the local resource capabilities.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans):

(In support) Pre-deployment and mobilization are key tools in the arsenal fire fighters use to battle wildfires, because the sooner that the brave men and women who battle our wildfires can get to them, the sooner they can contain them and the more people they can keep safe. Time is of the essence and a delay of a few minutes can make a difference between saving or losing property. A local fire agency can be quickly overwhelmed, but pre-positioning resources works by pre-positioning apparatuses, strike teams, or a task force where an incident is likely to occur, such as in a red flag weather condition where fires start easily and spread quickly.

Prior budget provisions allowed pre-deployment of resources to Kittitas, Yakima, and Spokane County, allowing fire fighters to respond more quickly to the Grey and Oregon Road fires, saving some homes that otherwise would have been lost. This approach has been used in states like California and by the Department of Natural Resources. It was also used for the atmospheric flooding in the winter of 2021 in Whatcom County. The program has been operating for the last four years with a similar fiscal note in the disaster relief fund.

The ability to put resources ahead of fire is very critical in the built environment, which is also susceptible to fire, as we have seen in the ongoing destruction of property and life, and the example of fire damage and displacement from the fires in Los Angeles. We want to give fire fighters the tools so that when a fire strikes, we are ready, because if it's predictable, it's preventable.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) This bill is important to the State of Washington. Pre-positioning of resources is already a current practice that has been piloted for the last four years now. Pre-positioning resources is an effective cost-containment effort that has saved taxpayer dollars by getting resources out there early on to help suppress emergency events before they escalate. An example of a time that pre-positioning was beneficial was the 2003 Yakima fires. Since this is already something in place, no additional staffing or personnel are needed to keep the program operating. Current appropriations support the efforts mandated in the bill.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans): Representative

Greg Nance, prime sponsor; Leonard Johson, Washington Fire Chiefs Association; and Randy Collins, Mason County Fire Marshal.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Leonard Johnson, Fire Chief, McLane Black Lake Fire Department.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.