

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1628

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to the creation of the fire service policy board.

Brief Description: Creating the fire service policy board.

Sponsors: Representatives Bronoske, Griffey, Schmidt, Simmons, Nance, Davis and Salahuddin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/4/25, 2/7/25 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/3/25, 97-0.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 4/15/25, 48-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Establishes the Washington State Fire Policy Board to advise the Director of Fire Protection on the State Fire Marshal's Office.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Waters, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doglio and Farivar.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Chase.

Staff: Connor Schiff (786-7093).

Background:

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

The State Fire Marshal's Office.

The Director of Fire Protection is the State Fire Marshal. The State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) is located within the Washington State Patrol (WSP).

The SFMO must:

- provide certification for firefighter professional qualifications;
- coordinate and deliver statewide training for firefighting and hazardous materials;
- license and issue certifications to businesses and individuals performing design, installation, testing, and maintenance of fire sprinkler systems;
- publish information regarding fire incidents around the state and timely information for Washington fire service agencies;
- conduct fire and life safety inspections in childcare, health care, and residential care facilities;
- regulate fireworks manufacturers, wholesalers, importers, and general display and pyrotechnic operator licensees for statutory compliance;
- test and certify all cigarette brands sold in Washington under the Fire Safe Cigarette Law, chapter 19.305 RCW; and
- serve as the fire resources coordinator when the Washington State Fire Services Mobilization Plan (Plan) is implemented. The Plan provides personnel, equipment, and other logistical resources when a wildland fire or other emergency exceeds the firefighting capacity of local jurisdictions.

Fire Service Delivery Workgroup.

In 2023 the Fire Service Delivery Workgroup (Workgroup) was established to evaluate existing funding and service delivery models for fire services provided by the SFMO. The Workgroup determined that the SFMO cannot maintain adequate levels of response and service to communities without adequate and sustained funding for fire services. The Workgroup concluded that the WSP and the SFMO have experienced significant changes since they were integrated and that the state's population, demographics, public safety expectations, and hazard risks have substantially grown, diversified, and evolved. Based on its findings, the Workgroup made several recommendations, including:

- creating a workgroup to study and define the necessary steps for an independent SFMO agency;
- creating a legislative liaison position to represent fire service stakeholders and the SFMO;
- establishing the Fire Service Advisory Committee to work with the legislative liaison, the SFMO, the WSP, the Office of Financial Management and the Governor's Office;
- enabling wage parity to sustain fire service recruitment and retention;
- revising civilian staff hiring policies at the WSP to narrow the pool of eligible candidates for noncommissioned SFMO positions;
- allocating adequate funding to firefighting training programs, the All-Risk Mobilization Program, and the SFMO's four unfunded mandates; and
- considering the SFMO's technology modernization study's recommendations.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The Washington State Fire Policy Board (Board) is established. The Board advises the Director of Fire Protection on matters related to the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO). The Board must develop recommendations for agency budget requests and strategies to enhance the safe and effective delivery of fire service training and resources.

The Board consists of the following members:

- the President of the Washington State Council of Firefighters or the President's designee;
- the President of the Washington State Firefighters' Association or the President's designee;
- the Executive Director of the Washington State Fire Commissioners Association or the Director's designee; and
- the President of the Washington State Fire Marshals Association or the President's Designee.

Members of the Board serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for travel expenses. Details regarding the frequency of Board meetings are provided.

The Board is encouraged to seek input from agencies, organizations, and representatives from industries regulated by the SFMO. The Board is permitted to create voluntary advisory committees. Individuals serving on an advisory committee or in an advisory capacity are prohibited from receiving any compensation or reimbursement.

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S):

The Senate amendment adds the Director of Fire Protection, who is the State Fire Marshal, or the Director's designee to the Washington State Fire Policy Board as a nonvoting ex officio member.

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) The responsibilities of the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) have expanded, and the state population has increased. The Fire Policy Board previously existed but was disbanded 10 years ago during budget cuts. The SFMO has been underfunded and deprioritized for the last 10 years. The 2023 workgroup concluded that the SFMO has been

underfunded for over a decade. Fire service training accounts have declined due to insufficient funding. The SFMO is underperforming statutory mandates, which compromises community and environmental safety, because of insufficient funding. There is unequal access to training activities, especially for rural communities. This proposal would support hazard responses, improve essential services, enhance safety, and increase the effectiveness of first responders. It is critical to bring fire service officials together to promote necessary policies. Formalized cooperation of fire service officials is necessary to support the work of the SFMO and restore pathways of communication between the fire service districts. This proposal would make the SFMO stronger. The SFMO should be more involved in code development and enforcement. Statewide standards are important; this would allow fire service officials to give professional recommendations on statewide standards. Hazardous materials are changing and this proposal would allow the SFMO to respond to these changes. It is important to have a system in place to track Occupational Safety and Health Administration qualifications, which are changing. It is difficult to have the SFMO in the WSP, as it bifurcates focus and spending.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Dave Kokot, WA State Association of Fire Marshals; Leonard Johnson; Steve Brooks, Washington Fire Chiefs; Fire Chief Harold Scoggins, City of Seattle Fire Department; Ryan Spiller, WA Fire Commissioners; John Linboe, WFCFA; and Nicholas Gullickson, Washington State Council of Firefighters.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.