SENATE BILL REPORT
HB 2104

As of February 26, 2026

Title: An act relating to aviation assurance funding in response to wildland fires.

Brief Description: Concerning aviation assurance funding in response to wildland fires.

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

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/26, 94-0.
Committee Activity: Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/19/26, 2/23/26 [DP-WM]. Ways & Means: 2/26/26.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes a July 1, 2027 expiration date for the Aviation Assurance Funding Program for local wildland fire response.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
Signed by Senators Chapman, Chair; Krishnadasan, Vice Chair; Short, Ranking Member; Liias, Muzzall, Saldaña, Schoesler, Shewmake and Wagoner.

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Jed Herman (786-7346)

Background: ESHB 1498, enacted in 2023, created the Aviation Assurance Funding Program to provide state aviation resources to local fire departments in limited

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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.

circumstances. This legislation expires July 1, 2027.

The Aviation Assurance Funding Program requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to use suppression funding to assist local fire departments with aerial response during the initial attack of wildland fires meeting certain parameters. Local fire departments must:

- have entered into a response agreement with DNR;
- provide documentation of specific personnel training; and
- make direct requests to the appropriate coordination center.

Aviation assets used in the initial attack must come from a list of private contractors approved by DNR on certain agreements, based on DNR's annual review of needs.

DNR must provide information to the Legislature in an annual report regarding the program usage, lessons learned, and recommendations for future improvements. DNR must annually consult with the State Fire Defense Committee, fire service representatives, and the State Fire Marshal's Office to review the program performance and upcoming aviation needs.

Summary of Bill: The July 1, 2027 expiration date for the Aviation Assurance Funding Program is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Agriculture & Natural Resources): PRO: When a local fire district can get an initial attack on a wildfire and knock a fire down before they expand, it prevents the need for going to state mobilization. Fires that reach state mobilization rarely cost less than $1 million. By getting aircraft assets out immediately saves money. Many rural fire departments do not have budgets to support aerial assets, and they are hesitant to call an air asset due to the costs. This approach has been a win-win for local fire departments and the state. A sunset date was put on the original bill, and with the success of the program this bill removes the sunset date. The state's aviation program is the single most successful tool for fighting fires. Aviation was also used to save a citizen trapped in a wildland fire. The program is saving lives and property and we need to keep this vital aviation resource available to fire districts and fire departments across Washington now and into the future.

Persons Testifying (Agriculture & Natural Resources): PRO: Representative Tom Dent, Prime Sponsor; Noel Hardin, Asotin County Fire District 1/ Washington Fire Chief's.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Agriculture & Natural Resources): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: I am here on behalf of my area fire districts and the Washington State Fire Chief Associations who are all in strong support. I've worked in wildland fires for forty years and this aviation support program has been the single most successful tool of my career. We've seen the success of having aviation assets. Last summer, a helicopter helped discover a disoriented citizen caught in a wildfire, so these assets do not only save property, but also lives. I respectfully ask for your support to keep this vital aviation resource available now and into the future.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Noel Hardin, Asotin County Fire District 1/Washington State Fire Chief's.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.