

**SENATE BILL REPORT**

**SB 5335**

**AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS, FEBRUARY 11, 1992**

**Brief Description:** Allowing benefits for emergency medical service district volunteers.

**SPONSORS:** Senators Rasmussen and Barr.

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS**

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5335 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chairman; Roach, Vice Chairman; Madsen, and Sutherland.

**Staff:** Martin Lovinger (786-7443)

**Hearing Dates:** February 18, 1991; March 4, 1991

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS**

**Majority Report:** That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5335 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McDonald, Chairman; Craswell, Vice Chairman; Amondson, Bailey, Bauer, Bluechel, Cantu, Gaspard, M. Kreidler, Metcalf, Murray, Newhouse, Niemi, Owen, Rinehart, Saling, L. Smith, Talmadge, West, Williams, and Wojahn.

**Staff:** Denise Graham (786-7715)

**Hearing Dates:** February 11, 1992

**BACKGROUND:**

There are emergency medical service districts in the state of Washington that depend heavily, as do many fire districts, upon the services of volunteers. There is a concern that the problem of burnout detected among volunteer firefighters may also exist with emergency medical volunteers. The problem for volunteer firefighters was addressed in part by previous legislation which provides them with certain relief and pension benefits. It is felt that a similar program for emergency medical volunteers would help address the problem of burnout and the resulting loss of experienced people. The creation of such a program would also address a basic inequity between two important groups of volunteers.

**SUMMARY:**

Counties that maintain and operate an emergency district shall enroll every emergency worker under the relief and compensation provisions of this chapter to provide protection for the workers and their families from death and disability in the performance of their duties. Counties may provide additional benefits. Counties may enroll workers under the pension provisions of this chapter if the worker chooses to participate.

A volunteer emergency workers' relief and pension fund is created in the State Treasury. The fund consists of the following:

1. Any gifts or donations made to the fund;
2. From the county an annual \$10 fee for each volunteer or part-paid member and a sum equal to 1 1/2 percent of the salaries of each full-time emergency district employee;
3. As much as is necessary of money received by the state from taxes on medical insurance premiums; and
4. An annual \$30 contribution per employee electing to join the pension plan if the county chooses to make such benefit available. The county would pay \$10 and the employee \$20.

A board of trustees is created consisting of three county commissioners, the county clerk, a councilmember from each city and municipality in the emergency district, the head of and an elected member of the emergency district. The board of trustees handles the local administrative functions. The board has the power to compel the attendance of witnesses to testify. The board shall receive no compensation for duties performed.

The procedure for applying for benefits and appealing decisions, the amount of awards to be made for qualifying emergency workers and their families and the procedures for determining and paying awards are set out in detail.

A state board is established consisting of three emergency district members, no two of whom can be from the same congressional district. Members are appointed by the Governor for overlapping six-year terms, compensated in accordance with RCW 43.03.240 and receive travel expenses for attending state board meetings and other authorized business. The state board acts as general supervisor and administrator, promulgates necessary rules, and acts as review and appeals board. The state board also appoints a secretary who maintains an office in Olympia.

**EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:**

Retirement at age 65 is no longer mandatory. Counties will not have to contribute 1 1/2 percent of the salaries of full-time employees of EMS districts to the relief and pension fund. The definition of performance of duty is changed to include training. Emergency workers are those listed under both Chapter 18.71 RCW and Chapter 18.73 RCW. Backup funding comes from the tax on premiums of accident, disability and medical insurance. There is no longer created a state board to administer the program. The state board for the volunteer firefighters' relief and pension fund will be expanded to include one EMS district member. The duties of the board are expanded to handle the EMS district volunteer workers' relief and pension benefits.

**EFFECT OF PROPOSED SECOND SUBSTITUTE:**

Volunteer emergency medical district workers are covered under the existing volunteer firefighters' relief and pension provisions. A board of trustees in each county with an emergency medical district administers the pension and relief provisions. The board of trustees is composed of three county commissioners, the county clerk, a councilmember from each city in the district, the head of the emergency district, and one elected member of the emergency district.

The state Board of Volunteer Firefighters is responsible for setting the contribution rates for the pension fund and for the relief fund. Contributions for pensions are to be paid by the districts and the emergency workers. Contributions for relief are to be paid by the districts.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** available

**TESTIMONY FOR (Governmental Operations):**

It is hard to recruit new people to do this work. Generally, volunteers take 110 hours to train and they quit after three years. It is expensive to volunteer due to cost of day care, ruined clothes, and the use of private vehicles. This bill is necessary to encourage volunteers and new recruits. It is a way of thanking the volunteers and providing protection. This will assist in building emergency medical services around the state, especially in rural areas.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST (Governmental Operations):**

Coverage should come from the volunteer firefighter relief and pension funds. The state should authorize an increase in property tax to pay for this program.

**TESTIFIED (Governmental Operations):** Dale Rawley, Brenda Calico, Bill Curtis, Oroville Ambulance (pro); Janet Griffith,

Department of Health (pro); Rick Wickman, Association of Washington Counties (con); Robb Menaul, Washington State Hospital Association (pro)

**TESTIMONY FOR (Ways & Means):**

This bill should be passed because volunteer emergency medical workers are deserving people, just as deserving as volunteer firefighters. The impact on the state would be minimal.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST (Ways & Means):** None

**TESTIFIED (Ways & Means):** Senators Rasmussen and Barr, sponsors