

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1101

Brief Description: Providing death benefits for volunteer fire fighters.

Background: Volunteer fire fighters receive retirement, disability and death benefits under the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension Act. The death benefit received by the survivors of a volunteer fire fighter who dies as a result of injuries received in the line of duty are as follows:

- A lump sum payment of \$2,000; and
- Monthly payments of :
 - \$1,275 for the life to the spouse.
 - and an additional payment of \$110 for each dependent child.
 - Total monthly payments cannot exceed \$2,550.

Benefits under the volunteer fire fighters' pension system are paid from the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension Fund. The primary funding source is 40 percent of the receipts from the state fire insurance premiums tax. In addition, volunteer fire fighters and municipalities each pay \$30 each month if electing to participate in the retirement provisions of the act.

Municipalities can choose to cover reserve law enforcement officers under the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension Act, but the only benefits they can receive under those provisions are retirement benefits. (Municipalities and reserve officers electing to receive retirement benefits under the volunteer fire fighters' pension system pay a monthly fee to cover the cost of the benefits.) Reserve officers cannot receive death or disability benefits under this system. Municipalities may choose to cover reserve officers under the Department of Labor and Industries death-benefit provisions.

The federal government provides a \$135,000 duty-death benefit to public safety officers, which include volunteer fire fighters and reserve officers, as well as full-time fire fighters and law enforcement officers.

In 1996, legislation was passed which provides a \$150,000 duty-related death benefit to survivors of police and fire fighters covered under the Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighter's retirement system and to members of the Washington State Patrol retirement system. The legislation also directed the Joint Committee on Pension Policy (JCPP) to study providing a similar death benefit to volunteer fire fighters and reserve

law enforcement officers. The JCPP recommended that a \$150,000 duty-related death benefit be extended to survivors of volunteer fire fighters and reserve police officers.

Summary: A payment of \$152,000 will be provided to the surviving spouse of a volunteer fire fighter who dies as the result of injuries received in the performance of his or her duties. The benefit is to be paid from the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension Fund.

A payment of \$150,000 will be provided to the surviving spouse of a reserve officer who dies as the result of injuries received in the course of employment. The benefit is to be paid initially from the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension Fund, but the fund will be reimbursed in the omnibus appropriations bill through a sundry claim appropriation.

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

Fiscal Note: Available.