

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1939

As Reported By House Committee On:
Government Administration
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to covering reserve law enforcement officers under volunteer fire fighters relief benefits.

Brief Description: Covering reserve law enforcement officers under volunteer fire fighters relief benefits.

Sponsors: Representatives Ogden, Cooper, Lantz, Anderson, Scott, O'Brien, Hatfield, Blalock, Kessler, Conway, Cody and Gardner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Administration: 1/16/98, 1/20/98 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/2/98, 2/5/98 [DPS(GVAD)].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doumit; Dunn; Dunshee; L. Thomas; Wensman and Wolfe.

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127).

Background: The Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension system was created in 1945 to provide death, disability, and retirement benefits to volunteer fire fighters in cities, towns, and fire protection districts. This system is supervised and controlled by the State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters.

Every local government employing volunteer fire fighters must participate in the death and disability portions of this system. Every local government employing volunteer fire fighters may opt to participate in the retirement benefits portion of this system.

The volunteer fire fighters' relief and trust fund is established in the state treasury to pay benefits to volunteer fire fighters under the system. A variety of moneys are placed into this fund, including annual fees for each member of the system that are

paid by the local government employer and 40 percent of the receipts from the state's excise tax on fire insurance premiums.

Legislation was enacted in 1995 allowing counties, cities, towns, and other local law enforcement agencies to extend the retirement benefits of the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension system to their reserve law enforcement officers. Each reserve officer covered by the retirement system is required to pay an annual \$30 fee and each local government employer of a participating reserve officer is required to pay an additional annual fee to finance this retirement benefits, as determined by the State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters based on the latest actuarial valuation.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Any county, city, town, or other law enforcement agency may extend the death and disability benefits portion of the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension system to its reserve officers and pay annual fees that are sufficient to cover the costs of this coverage. The State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters and Reserve Officers sets the annual fees to pay for this coverage.

A municipality that extends these death and disability benefits to its reserve officers is provided with the same extent of immunity from civil actions for personal injuries to its reserve officers that would arise if the reserve officers were covered under the state's industrial insurance program.

A board of trustees is created in each local government with reserve officers covered by these death and disabilities benefits to administer the system for the local government. A board of trustees in a city or town or special district consists of the mayor, city clerk or comptroller, one council member, or their designees, the head of the law enforcement agency, and one reserve member of the law enforcement agency who is elected by the reserve members for an annual term. A board of trustees in a county consists of two members of the county legislative authority and the county auditor, or their designees, the head of the law enforcement agency, and one reserve officer from the law enforcement agency who is elected by the reserve officers for an annual term.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Extension of the death and disability benefits to reserve officers is optional with the municipal employer, rather than being mandatory. The extension of immunity from civil actions for personal injuries to reserve officers, if they are enrolled under these benefits, was added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 12, 1998.

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

Testimony For: Reserve officers are very important and deserve disability coverage. We should be thankful for their assistance.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Rep. Ogden, prime sponsor; Chuck Munson, Wenatchee Police Department; Paul Figueroa, Winlock Police Department; Jim Justin, Association of Washington cities; Bill Vogler, Washington State Association of Counties; Larry Slavens, Sunnyside Police Department; and Michael Burris, Washington State Law Enforcement Association.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Government Administration be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Benson; Carlson; Chopp; Cody; Cooke; Crouse; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lambert; Linville; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; Poulsen; Regala; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan; Talcott and Tokuda.

Staff: Denise Graham (786-7137).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee on Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee on Government Administration: No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill provides cities the same protection as is provided under the Workers' Compensation program. Being a volunteer reserve officer is a very difficult job. It takes too much time to get coverage under labor and industries.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Val Ogden, prime sponsor; and Jim Justin, Association of Washington Cities.