

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1939

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations, February 26, 1998

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: House Committee on Government Administration (originally sponsored by Representatives Ogden, Cooper, Lantz, Anderson, Scott, O'Brien, Hatfield, Blalock, Kessler, Conway, Cody and Gardner).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 2/26/98 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Hale, Vice Chair; Anderson, Haugen, Horn, Patterson and T. Sheldon.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

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 benefit, as determined by the State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters based on the latest actuarial valuation.

Summary of Bill: Any county, city, town, or other municipality's 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 elects to extend 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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: There is a potential for cities to save money if they elect to provide this benefit to their reserve officers. The benefits of the Volunteer Fire Fighters' plan and workers' compensation are the same but administration and oversight will be more effective at the local level and get the benefits paid more quickly.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Jim Justin, AWC (pro).