

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 2147

C 57 L 07

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Providing vocational rehabilitation services for volunteer firefighters and reserve officers.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Kristiansen, Ericks, Chandler, Blake, Curtis, Morrell, Roberts, Hurst, Pearson, McCune, Moeller, B. Sullivan, Simpson, Santos, Ormsby, Newhouse and Kelley).

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections

Background:

The Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension System (VFFRORPS) provides death, disability, medical, and retirement benefits to volunteer fire fighters and reserve officers in cities, towns, and fire protection districts. The system is funded by member and employer contributions and a portion of the fire insurance premium tax.

The State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters and Reserve Officers (Board) administers the VFFRORPS. The Board consists of three members of fire departments covered by the VFFRORPS, no two of whom may be from the same congressional district. The members are appointed by the Governor for overlapping six-year terms.

Employers are required to participate in the death, disability, and medical benefit plans offered by the VFFRORPS, but participation in the pension component is optional. About 18,000 members are covered by the death, disability, and medical benefits, and 12,000 members are covered by the pension benefits. Members that are disabled may be eligible for both temporary duty disability benefits and, after six months of disablement, ongoing disability allowances of up to \$2,994 per month. To be eligible for the disability benefits, a member must be disabled to the extent that he or she is unable to engage in any occupation, or has lost the use of limbs or eyesight. The Board may also provide lump-sum partial disability benefits in the same amounts as provided for through the workers' compensation system.

The VFFRORPS does not provide benefits that pay for expenses associated with the vocational rehabilitation of injured members.

Summary:

When, in the sole discretion of the Board, vocational rehabilitation is likely to enable a disabled members return to employment, benefits may be paid from the VFFRORPS fund. Up to \$4,000 may be paid for the costs of education and associated costs, including on-the-job training fees or tools necessary for self-employment or reemployment. The \$4,000 must be

used within 52 weeks of the Board approval of vocational rehabilitation benefits, except for job placement expenses, which may be extended by the Board for up to an additional 52 weeks. The Board may engage with the Washington Employment Security Department to provide job placement under these provisions.

An additional \$5,000 may be authorized by the Board for physician-approved accommodations necessary for participation in a retraining plan or for performing the essential functions of an occupation.

The vocational rehabilitation benefits are available to participants who either have claims pending on the effective date of the act, or whose injury occurred on or after January 1, 2006.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 97 0

Senate 48 0

Effective: July 22, 2007