

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 2202

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Addressing the eligibility of emergency medical technicians for membership in the law enforcement officers' and firefighters' retirement system plan 2.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Manweller and Ormsby).

House Committee on Appropriations

Background:

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) are licensed by the Department of Health upon completion of approved training and association with an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agency, a law enforcement agency, a business with an organized safety team, or as instructors or coordinators with approved EMS training programs. There are several types of licensed EMTs, for example the "Physician's Trained Advanced Emergency Medical Technician and Paramedic," and the broader category of "Emergency Medical Technician." Emergency Medical Technicians are defined as providing "Emergency Medical Service" if they render care at the scene of a medical emergency or while transporting a patient to a medical facility.

In 2005 the Legislature added EMTs employed on a full-time, fully compensated basis by a city, town, county, or district to the definition of "Firefighter" in the Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' Retirement System (LEOFF). In some instances, employers and employees were not aware that these employees had become newly eligible for LEOFF membership.

Cities, towns, and counties are authorized to create public corporations in order to improve the administration of authorized federal grants or programs, to improve governmental efficiency and services, or to improve the general living conditions in the urban areas of the state, or any city, town, or county.

The LEOFF provides retirement and disability benefits to full-time, fully compensated general authority law enforcement officers and firefighters. Members of the plan first becoming eligible for the LEOFF on or after October 1, 1977, are members of the LEOFF Plan 2. The LEOFF Plan 2 provides for retirement benefits based on 2 percent of a member's average final salary per year of service credit, and a normal retirement age of 53. Enhanced

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early retirement benefits are available to members with 20 or more years of service, and disability benefits are provided for members disabled, or catastrophically disabled, in the line of duty. Contributions are paid into the LEOFF Plan 2 by employees (50 percent of the total rate), employers (30 percent), and the state (20 percent). The total contribution rate for the LEOFF Plan 2 is 17.5 percent of pay.

In 2008 the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS) began the adoption of administrative rules to define EMT for purposes of the LEOFF Plan 2. The rules were finalized in 2009 and established that LEOFF EMTs must be certified by the DOH as EMTs and complete the requirements of their employer to perform the duties of an EMT.

In 2010 the DRS identified that there could be significant numbers of EMTs who are employed by Public Hospital Districts (PHDs) and who became eligible for the LEOFF Plan 2 in 2005, but had not been enrolled. In 2011 the DRS determined that Public Hospital District (PHD) EMTs meeting the employee definition would be enrolled in the LEOFF. This determination was administratively appealed by the PHDs, and in 2016 the DRS' final determination was appealed to Chelan County Superior Court.

A member of the LEOFF Plan 2 may establish service credit in the plan if not previously credited according to law. The Director of the DRS may bill an employer for employer and employee contributions and interest, and following the employer notifying the DRS that the employee has reimbursed the employer for the employee contributions, credit the service to the employee's account. Failure by the employee to pay the employer does not reduce the employer's obligation to the retirement plan.

In the 1956 *Bakenhus v. City of Seattle* case, the state Supreme Court held that members of the state's retirement systems have a constitutionally protected contractual right to a secure retirement benefit. Subsequent decisions found that the contract-like pension benefit vests on the first day of employment covered by the pension plan, though a member may not earn enough service to be entitled to a specific benefit until years later.

Summary:

The definition of new employees eligible for LEOFF Plan 2 membership prospectively is narrowed from all eligible EMTs employed by LEOFF Plan 2 employers to EMS providers. Emergency Medical Service providers are Physician's Trained Advanced Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians that provide medical treatment at the scene of a medical emergency or while transporting a patient to a medical facility.

The definition of "employer" for members of the LEOFF Plan 2 is broadened to include public corporations created by a city, town, or county.

The DRS is required to notify persons eligible to establish LEOFF Plan 2 service credit earned as EMTs on or after July 24, 2005, of the requirement that the person elect to purchase that service before July 1, 2018.

For members that provided EMT service in the LEOFF Plan 2, the DRS will provide, upon receipt of a written request from the EMT, the cost of establishing service credit for LEOFF Plan 2 service earned after July 24, 2005. The EMT may elect to purchase that service before July 1, 2018, and has five years to make the required contributions. Upon completion of payments, the DRS will bill the employer for the contributions, reduced by any contributions made to a retirement account for that employee for the same period, up to 3 percent of pay.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	96	0
Senate	47	1

Effective: July 23, 2017