

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5925

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**As Passed House:**  
February 27, 2024

**Title:** An act relating to fire protection district commissioner per diem compensation.

**Brief Description:** Concerning fire protection district commissioner per diem compensation.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Local Government, Land Use & Tribal Affairs (originally sponsored by Senators Torres, Lovelett, Short and Van De Wege).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Local Government: 2/16/24, 2/20/24 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/27/24, 93-1.

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Allows commissioners of fire protection districts with an operating budget of \$10 million or more to receive 144 per diem payments per year, at a rate determined by the Office of Financial Management.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Duerr, Chair; Alvarado, Vice Chair; Goehner, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Griffey and Riccelli.

**Staff:** Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

**Background:**

Fire Protection Districts.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Fire protection districts are established for the provision of fire prevention services, fire suppression services, and emergency medical services for the protection of life and property. Fire protection districts are formed through a petition from the residents of a proposed district, a public hearing, and three-fifths voter approval.

The affairs of the district are managed by a board of elected fire commissioners, initially composed of three commissioners. Boards of commissioners may be increased to five or seven commissioners through a resolution or petition signed by 10 percent of voters and submitted to the county legislative authority. After the resolution is submitted, the county legislative authority must call a special election proposing an increase from three members to five or seven members. A majority of voters must approve the increase.

Each commissioner must receive \$104 per day, for a total of up to \$9,984 per year, for time spent attending official board meetings or performing other services for the fire protection district. Ex officio members of the board do not receive compensation. The dollar thresholds must be adjusted for inflation by the Office of Financial Management every five years, beginning January 1, 2019, based upon changes in the consumer price index during that time period.

Beginning January 1, 2024, payment of compensation for each member of the board is set at a rate of \$161 per day, with compensation for each commissioner not to exceed \$15,456 per year.

**Summary of Bill:**

Fire protection district commissioners of a district that has an operating budget of \$10 million or more may receive up to 144 per diem payments per year, at the per diem rate specified by the Office of Financial Management, and adjusted for inflation.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Fire commissioners have to attend more meetings during fire season, especially in rural communities. Currently, commissioners are limited to 90 per diem payments per year. This bill seeks to increase that number to 144. The increase will not impact the state budget and will only apply to larger districts. The 18 districts that would qualify are bigger than most cities in the state. They have authority to write their own warrants and invest their own funds. In many cases, they have merged, which lowers the number of

commissioners. This means fewer commissioners and more work. Responsibilities include attending board meetings and other meetings, as well as conferences for state laws and best practices. There are regional meetings to discuss consolidation for better performance and financially sound practices. Some commissioners for central Pierce County run out of per diem days by June or July, which means the rest of the year they are working free.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Nikki Torres, prime sponsor; Ryan Spiller, Washington Fire Commissioners; and Robert Homan, Graham Fire and Rescue.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.