

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2608

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Ways & Means, February 22, 2006

Title: An act relating to the volunteer fire fighters' and reserve officers' relief and pension act.

Brief Description: Defining performance of duty for the volunteer fire fighters' and reserve officers' relief and pension act.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Curtis, Takko, Bailey, Grant, Orcutt, Hinkle, McDonald, Clements, Moeller, Chandler, Wallace, O'Brien, Haler, Haigh, Alexander and Morrell).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/11/06, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/21/06, 2/22/06 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Fairley, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Pflug, Pridemore, Rasmussen and Rockefeller.

Staff: Erik Sund (786-7454)

Background: The Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension System (Volunteer Fire System) provides relief and pension benefits for members of regularly organized volunteer fire departments and law enforcement agencies. Members who serve and make monthly retirement contributions for a period of at least 25 years are eligible to receive a pension benefit at age 65.

Relief benefits include payment of medical expenses and disability pensions for members injured in the performance of duty and payment of burial expenses and survivor benefits for members killed in the performance of duty. The performance of duty is defined to include working at company quarters, fire stations, law enforcement precincts, and at other places under the general orders of the chief or other officer, participating in training activities, or responding to calls to duty or other emergency calls in accordance with the rules of the local fire department or law enforcement agency.

Employers are required to participate in the death, disability, and medical benefit plans offered by the Volunteer Fire System, 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. Volunteer Fire System benefits are administered by the Washington State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' (Board) and paid out of the Volunteer Fire System Fund (Fund). Revenues to the Fund come from: a 40 percent share of the premium tax paid on fire insurance policies issued

within the state; contributions from volunteer fire fighters, emergency workers, and reserve officers; contributions from participating municipal corporations and emergency service districts; and returns on the investment of monies in the Fund.

Summary of Bill: The definition of "performance of duty" or "performance of service" in the Volunteer Fire System includes other officially assigned duties that are secondary to duties as a fire fighter, emergency worker, or reserve officer, including maintenance, public education, inspections, investigations, court testimony, and fundraising for the benefit of the department. Performance of duty or service also includes being on call or standby under the orders of the chief or designated officer, except at the individual's home or place of business.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Volunteer fire fighters do much more for their communities than just fighting fires. This bill would help volunteer fire fighters and help recruit them by ensuring that they and their families will be taken care of if something happens to them.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Representative Richard Curtis, prime sponsor.