



SOUTH CAROLINA REVENUE AND FISCAL AFFAIRS OFFICE
STATEMENT OF ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT
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Bill Number: H. 3463 Introduced on January 10, 2023
Author: Long
Subject: Firefighter Training and Employment
Requestor: House Ways and Means
RFA Analyst(s): Daigle
Impact Date: February 22, 2024

Fiscal Impact Summary

This bill requires an employer who hires a firefighter to reimburse the firefighter's former employer for mandatory firefighter training costs. This applies to more than one subsequent employer, and no employer may be reimbursed for more than 100 percent of the training costs.

The expenditure impact of this bill on local fire departments is undetermined because the amount, type, and location of mandatory firefighter training is set by local fire departments. The State Fire Academy (Academy) underwrites the majority of the costs of training courses, but local departments still incur expenses during training, including salaries and equipment costs, which can vary across the state. For reference, the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA) contacted all counties and the Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC). County governments indicate that training costs per firefighter range from \$100 to \$19,400, and turnover rates are as high as 75 percent. MASC indicates that training costs per municipal firefighter range from \$800 to \$14,378 based on information from the responding municipal governments. Additionally, municipal fire departments average a turnover rate of 2 percent to 50 percent.

Explanation of Fiscal Impact

Introduced on January 10, 2023

State Expenditure

N/A

State Revenue

N/A

Local Expenditure

This bill requires an employer who hires a firefighter to reimburse the firefighter's former employer for mandatory firefighter training costs. If the firefighter is hired within one year of completing training, the new employer must reimburse 100 percent of the training costs, including the firefighter's salary paid during training. If the firefighter is hired after one year but within two years of completing training, the new employer must reimburse 50 percent of the costs. This applies to more than one subsequent employer, and no employer may be reimbursed for more than 100 percent of the training costs.

The expenditure impact to local fire departments resulting from reimbursing the previous employers of new hires, who were trained by that previous employer within the last two years, is undetermined. South Carolina Code of Laws does not mandate or authorize the Academy to mandate minimum training hours or training courses for firefighters. Thus, mandatory firefighter training is determined by the authority having jurisdiction, which is most often the local fire department or local fire chief. The authority having jurisdiction may decide to train firefighters “in-house,” through the Academy, or through a third-party training. Additionally, apart from course costs, the authority having jurisdiction incurs additional expenses during a firefighter’s mandatory training that varies across the state.

For reference, RFA reached out to all counties regarding the expenditure impact of this bill and received responses from six counties. Anderson County indicates that it does not employ firefighters. Dillon County indicates that the county spends approximately \$100 per firefighter for training and reports little turnover. Dorchester County indicates that the county spends no more than \$5,000 for training costs, which includes training courses, gear, and salary for the days when the firefighter is scheduled for duty. Dorchester County also reports a turnover rate of firefighters of 40 percent to 50 percent per year. Hampton County indicates that the county has 6 full-time firefighters and spends about \$5 per class for each firefighter. Hampton County also indicates a low turnover rate of firefighters. Fairfield County indicates that they budget \$1,800 for training classes annually, and they do not hire untrained firefighters. Additionally, Fairfield County indicates a low turnover rate of firefighters and have had only two firefighters leave since 2016, one of which was a retirement. Oconee County indicates that it spends approximately \$19,400 in training for its career firefighters, which includes courses through the SC Fire Academy, uniforms, and personnel expenses for each firefighter. Oconee County further indicates that its historical turnover rate is 65 percent to 75 percent. However, the county recently implemented a new pay adjustment and anticipates this will help retain firefighters. If additional gear or personal protective equipment is needed, the aforementioned costs would increase by approximately \$5,000. It is important to note that personal protective equipment, uniforms, and footwear are sometimes purchased to fit individuals and are not always transferrable between firefighters.

RFA also contacted MASC, who conducted a poll of local fire departments. MASC indicates that it received responses from nineteen municipalities that serve populations ranging from 1,033 (Town of Edisto Beach) and 136,632 (City of Columbia). The responding municipalities report that training costs range from \$800 for Academy courses to \$14,378 for Academy courses, gear, per diem, mileage, and salary. Fifteen municipalities indicate that total training costs for FY 2022-23 range from \$500 (City of Gaffney) to \$400,000 (Town of Mt. Pleasant). The City of Columbia indicates that it shares firefighter training costs with Richland County since the city provides fire services to the county. Further, the responding municipalities also report that the turnover rate of firefighters ranges from 2 percent (City of Gaffney) to 50 percent (Town of Edisto Beach).

Further, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) reports that the Academy, which is under the administration of OSFM, typically underwrites 82 percent to 95 percent of costs per student

so the majority of the authorities having jurisdiction spend between \$5 and \$25 per class per student, including course texts. In FY 2022-23, the Academy completed 2,537 courses for 31,924 students, and local departments paid a total of \$729,157 in course fees for classes provided by the Academy. The Academy offers an eight-week training program that costs \$1,000 and usually covers lodging, gear rental, breakfast and lunch meals, and training materials. A third meal and salary and fringe benefits during training are not covered by the Academy.

Career firefighters and volunteer firefighters usually undergo different training requirements across different counties and municipalities. Also, some counties do not hire firefighters and rely on volunteers. The Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation reports in its 2022-23 annual report that there are approximately 18,000 firefighters in South Carolina. OSFM reports that approximately 33 percent (5,940) are paid, and 67 percent (12,060) are volunteer. Additionally, it is not uncommon for volunteer firefighters who undergo training to transfer to career positions.

In summary, the expenditure impact of this bill on local fire departments is undetermined since the amount, type, and location of firefighter training is determined by each local entity. Additionally, the salaries, pay structure, turnover rates, and the qualifications of applicants vary across the state.

Local Revenue

N/A



Frank A. Rainwater, Executive Director