



# SOUTH CAROLINA REVENUE AND FISCAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

## STATEMENT OF ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT

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<b>Bill Number:</b>	H. 3188	Introduced on January 14, 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Firefighter Training Reimbursement	
<b>Requestor:</b>	House Ways and Means	
<b>RFA Analyst(s):</b>	Daigle	
<b>Impact Date:</b>	March 7, 2025	

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### Fiscal Impact Summary

This bill requires an employer who hires a firefighter within a certain period of time 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 and varies widely across the state. 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 overtime, medical clearances, drug screenings, uniforms, 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 total training costs per firefighter range from \$200 to \$4,000, not including uniforms, equipment, and salaries which would also be subject to reimbursement pursuant to this bill. Based on data collected in 2024, MASC indicated that total municipalities reported their direct costs paid for firefighter training range from \$500 (City of Gaffney) to \$400,000 (Town of Mt. Pleasant); however, it is important to note that some municipalities did not include uniform, equipment, and salaries in the reported training costs while some did.

### Explanation of Fiscal Impact

#### Introduced on January 14, 2025

##### 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. 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. Training costs include the firefighter's salary paid during the training period and other training expenses incurred.

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. Therefore, 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 (LLR) reports in its 2023-24 annual report that there are approximately 18,000 firefighters in South Carolina. LLR provided information on firefighter training including that in FY 2023-24, 2,868 public fire training courses were conducted and completed by 33,191 students, and the total billed for public fire training was approximately \$734,000. Furthermore, 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 eleven counties. The following are responses from the counties who provided information on the estimated expenditure impact due to this bill. Dorchester County reports that this bill will increase expenses for Dorchester fire departments as they may not be able to afford to reimburse training costs since there is no set cost for training, and training expenses can vary widely between jurisdictions. Based on information provided by Kershaw County, RFA anticipates that this bill will have an undetermined expenditure impact on the county's fire departments. Laurens County indicates that this bill will have a significant impact on the county budget and increase fire department expenses. The increase in expenditures for Laurens County is dependent on the amount of salaries that would have to be reimbursed, but they estimate that this could increase expenses by at least \$20,000. For reference, the county currently incurs approximately \$15,000 in training expenses for firefighters. Florence County indicates that this bill will have an undetermined impact as any increase in expenses will depend on the training costs incurred by new hires at their previous employer fire department that will have to be reimbursed and any reimbursement a department may receive for training costs when a firefighter who leaves the fire department is hired by another employer. Florence notes that a primary determinant of cost will be the salary and overtime pay a firefighter received during their training period, which may increase expenses depending on the relative sizes of departments complying with the new reimbursement process and where a firefighter completed their training. Florence also notes that salary and overtime pay reimbursements alone may supersede their current training costs. Aiken County indicates that this bill will increase expenses for the county's fire service, and while the local departments may be able to absorb the increase in expenses, the increase in expenses is unknown. Aiken also notes that some volunteer departments who hire one firefighter may find it difficult, if not impossible, to reimburse another department within their current budgets. In contrast, Sumter County indicates that this bill may reduce expenses as they report more firefighters

leave the county fire services after their training than they receive already trained from other fire departments.

Overall, the expenditure impact on counties is undetermined and dependent on training costs incurred by each county, firefighter turnover within each county, and whether county fire departments typically hire firefighters with some previous training. For information, the following table is a compilation of the estimated approximate training cost, employment, and turnover information received by the counties that illustrates the wide range of requirements and costs incurred for training across different counties in the state. Please note that missing entries are not reflective of \$0 in cost, but instead indicative of missing information.

<b>Estimated Approximate County Firefighter Training Costs, Employment, and Turnover Information</b>								
	Dorchester	Kershaw <sup>1</sup>	Laurens	Sumter <sup>2</sup>	Florence <sup>3</sup>	Oconee <sup>4</sup>	Beaufort <sup>5</sup>	Lexington <sup>6</sup>
Per Career Firefighter:			\$100					
Training Cost per Firefighter	< \$5000	\$1,000	to \$1,500	\$1,065	\$885	\$200	\$2,500	\$4,000
Other Costs During Training		\$4,375	\$4,000	\$7,492		\$9,850	\$3,000	\$16,017
Salary During Training				\$7,000			\$10,000	\$21,648
Total Amount Spent on Training and Related Expenses (All Firefighters)			\$15,000	\$60,000	\$55,580		\$620,000	\$164,826
Majority of Hires Have Some Previous Training		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Turnover Rate (%)				15 - 20	10	10 - 15	12 - 16	9
Average Length of Employment (yrs)		3.5						
Number of Career Firefighters		50	35	108	104	64	250	309
Number of Volunteer Firefighters		85	238	140	196	300		5

RFA also contacted MASC, who conducted a poll of local fire departments in 2024. 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 expenditure impact due to departments reimbursing and being reimbursed for firefighter training costs is dependent on several factors, one of which being the training costs incurred by departments. MASC indicates that

<sup>1</sup> Kershaw notes that training costs increase as a firefighter progresses through the ranks.

<sup>2</sup> Total county training budget includes total annual training for volunteers and career firefighters.

<sup>3</sup> Total county training budget does not include overtime pay for firefighters during training.

<sup>4</sup> Training costs do not include overtime pay, and if an employee opts to do EMT training, the cost is \$600 plus the cost for an instructor at \$17 to \$25 per hour. Before recent pay adjustments, turnover rate was 50%.

<sup>5</sup> Approximately one third of applicants have had some previous training.

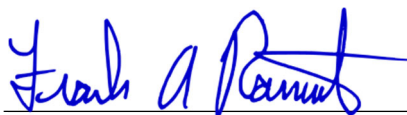
<sup>6</sup> Total county fees include budget for training, conferences, schools, programs, dues, special operations, supplies, books, etc.

training costs vary greatly because each fire department determines what training is required for its respective department. For example, some departments require EMT or Paramedic training, while others do not. For reference, fifteen municipalities indicate that total training costs for FY 2022-23 range from \$500 (City of Gaffney) to \$400,000 (Town of Mt. Pleasant). Additionally, it is important to note that training costs are likely greater than reported as MASC notes that most municipalities did not include uniform and equipment in the reported training costs, which would be included in training costs pursuant to the bill. For information, MASC estimates a combined total for uniforms and PPE/Bunker Gear as approximately \$10,000 per new hire. In addition, the expenditure impact due to departments reimbursing and being reimbursed for firefighter training costs is also dependent on the amount of firefighter turnover that a department experiences as lower turnover rates help keep training costs relatively low. MASC reports that turnover rates across municipalities vary greatly as the responding municipalities report that the turnover rate of firefighters ranges from 2 percent (City of Gaffney) to 50 percent (Town of Edisto Beach). Overall, the average turnover rate for reporting municipalities was 14.4 percent and that the average tenure of firefighters across reporting departments is less than five years for those who leave. For information, Edisto Beach reports that it only has 3 firefighters, but those that leave only work for an average of six to twelve months before moving to departments with higher pay and shorter commutes. The expenditure impact due to departments reimbursing and being reimbursed for firefighter training costs is also dependent on whether fire departments hire previously trained firefighters or first-time firefighters. MASC indicates that seven municipal departments reported hiring a majority of first-time firefighters, eight departments reported hiring a majority of trained firefighters, and the remaining respondents reported hiring a mix of previously trained and first-time firefighters. Since training costs, requirements, turnover rates, and hiring practices vary among municipal fire departments, the expenditure impact to municipal fire departments is undetermined.

Some additional concerns were expressed by both municipal and county respondents. MASC reports that six departments express significant concerns about the implementation of this bill. Specifically, questions were raised regarding how this bill may be enforced as well as concerns about the need for exemptions, including an exemption for firefighters who may move for family emergencies. Furthermore, one county expressed concerns that this bill may negatively impact at will employment status. Additional concerns are that this bill may hamper a firefighter's career growth by compelling them to remain at the department where they are trained, and may discourage departments from recruiting firefighters on the basis of pay and benefit incentives, preferable call volumes, and other factors. Another county also expressed concerns that this bill may inhibit their recruiting ability.

## **Local Revenue**

N/A



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