



## Expanding the Definition of “Fire Fighter” for Volunteer Fire Departments

### **Brief Description:**

This legislation would expand the definition of “fire fighter” in RCW 41.24 for volunteer fire departments to include critical fire ground personnel that do not perform suppression duties.

### **Background:**

The Board for Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers (BVFF) 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 10 years are eligible to receive a pension benefit at age 60.

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.

Employers are required to participate in the death, disability, and medical benefit plans offered by the BVFF, but participation in the pension component is optional. About 14,000 members are covered by the death, disability, and medical benefits and 12,000 members are covered by the pension benefits. 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 district; and returns on the investment of moneys in the Fund.

### **Summary of Bill:**

This bill would expand the definition of “fire fighter” to allow all members of fire departments that respond to emergency calls, have assigned tasks at emergency scenes, and participate in emergency training, to be covered for relief and pension benefits offered by the BVFF. After surveying departments, it was determined that the passage of this bill may add approximately 1,800 additional members to the BVFF system.

Examples of the additional members that would be covered are Public Information Officers, Fire Investigators and Chaplains. It would also clarify that members of regional fire authorities are eligible for participation.

### **Stakeholder Input:**

The Washington State Firefighters’ Association, the Washington Fire Commissioners Association, and the Washington Fire Chiefs all worked cooperatively, with input from the Washington State Board for Volunteer Firefighters to draft the proposed legislation.

**For more information, please contact Tamara Warnke, Washington State Fire Fighters’ Association**

---

Founded in 1923, the WSFFA is the oldest statewide fire service organization. Its mission is to represent the interests of the volunteer firefighters and EMS responders throughout the state of Washington. This is done with a focus of providing education, information, benefits and representation to the volunteer fire service in order to enhance their capabilities and professionalism. Membership includes more than 400 fire departments and districts, representing over 15,000 volunteers. The WSFFA is a non-profit organization under IRS regulations part 501(c)(3). Further information on the WSFFA may be found at [www.wsffa.org](http://www.wsffa.org) or by calling 1-800-340-8023.