

II. Present Situation:

Firefighter Death Benefits

Section 112.191(2)(a), F.S., requires a firefighter's employer or employer's insurer to pay a firefighter's beneficiary a \$50,000 death benefit payment, adjusted for inflation, if that firefighter is accidentally killed while *engaging in the performance of his or her firefighter duties*, or if that firefighter receives an accidental injury in the line of duty and the injury results in the death of the firefighter.

In addition to the accidental death benefit payment required under s. 112.191(2)(a), s. 112.191(2)(b), F.S., requires a firefighter's employer or employer's insurer to pay a firefighter's beneficiary an additional \$50,000 payment, adjusted for inflation, if that firefighter is accidentally killed in the line of duty *while responding to an emergency involving the protection of life and property*.

If a firefighter is *unlawfully and intentionally* killed, or dies as a result of a fire caused by an act of arson, s. 112.191(2)(c), F.S., requires the firefighter's employer or employer's insurer to pay the firefighter's beneficiary a death benefit payment of \$150,000, adjusted for inflation.

The amounts of benefit payments under s. 112.191(2)(a)-(c), F.S., are statutorily-established and are adjusted each year based on the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers, which is published by the U.S. Department of Labor.¹ The Division of State Fire Marshal within the Department of Financial Services adjusts the statutory amount by July 1 of each year using the most recent month for which data are available at the time of the adjustment.² The current death benefit amount for firefighters is:

- \$59,879 for an accidental death or injury that results in death under s. 112.191(2)(a), F.S.
- \$59,879 in addition to the payment made under s. 112.191(2)(a), F.S., for an accidental death that occurs while the firefighter was responding to an emergency involving the protection of life and property under s.112.191(2)(b), F.S.
- \$166,779.27 if the firefighter is unlawfully or intentionally killed or dies as a result of a fire caused by an act of arson under s.112.191(2)(c), F.S.

Firefighter employers³ are required to maintain an ability to pay the benefits provided in s. 112.191, F.S., and at the request of the Division of State Fire Marshal, may be required to provide evidence of their ability to pay.⁴

The benefits outlined in s. 112.191, F.S., are in addition to any benefits a firefighter may be entitled to under a workers compensation or pension plan.⁵

¹ Section 119.191(2)(i), F.S.

² Section 112.191(2) (i), F.S., *See also* Rule 69A-64.005, F.A.C.

³ Section 112.191(1)(a), F.S., defines "employer" to mean a "state board, commission, department, division, bureau or agency, or a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state".

⁴ Rule 69A-64.003, F.A.C., *See also* s. 112.191(4)(a), F.S.

⁵ Section 112.191(2)(e), F.S. *See also* Division of State Fire Marshal website. *State of Florida Line-of-Duty Death Resources* available at <http://www.myfloridacfo.com/SFM/LODDResource.htm> (last visited on February 1, 2010).

Current definition of “line of duty”

Under Rule 69A-64.002, F.A.C., the terms “line of duty” or “engaging in the performance of his or her firefighter duties” means:

- Engaging in any activity which is within the firefighter’s job or position description or scope of employment, regardless of whether the firefighter was actually “on duty” at his or her place of employment or not.
- Responding to any emergency or reasonably believing that he or she is responding to an emergency.
- Fighting a fire or engaging in any emergency life- or property-saving activity.
- Returning from responding to any emergency or from having reasonably believed that he or she was responding to an emergency.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill expands the purposes for which an additional accidental death benefit of \$50,000, adjusted for inflation, is payable by requiring payment of the benefit when a firefighter’s death occurs due to participation in a training exercise.

The bill also expands the purposes for which a death benefit of \$150,000, adjusted for inflation, is payable by requiring payment of the benefit when a firefighter is injured by an unlawful and intentional act of another person while engaged in the performance of his or her firefighter duties and dies as a result of such injury.

The bill provides that the Legislature finds that this act fulfills an important state interest.

The bill specifies that the act will take effect upon becoming a law and that it will apply to firefighter deaths occurring on or after November 1, 2003.

IV. Constitutional Issues:**A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

To the extent this bill requires cities and counties to expend funds to pay these new death benefits, the provisions of Section 18(a) of Article VII of the State Constitution may apply. If those provisions do apply, in order for the law to be binding upon the cities and counties, the legislature must find that the law fulfills an important state interest, and one of the following relevant exceptions must apply:

- a. Funds estimated at the time of enactment to be sufficient to fund such expenditures are appropriated to the cities and counties;
- b. Counties and cities are authorized to enact a funding source not available for such local governments on February 1, 1989, that can be used to generate the amount of funds necessary to fund the expenditures;
- c. The law applies to all persons similarly situated, including state government; or

- d. The law is approved by two-thirds of the membership of each house of the legislature.

Section 18(d) of Article VII of the State Constitution exempts laws that have insignificant fiscal impact on cities and counties from the requirements of subsection (a). The impacts on cities and counties is unknown at this time.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. Other Constitutional Issues:

This bill provides that the act will apply to firefighter deaths occurring on or after November 1, 2007. Retroactive operation is disfavored by courts. Generally, “statutes are prospective and will not be construed to have retroactive operation unless the language employed in the enactment is so clear it will admit of no other construction.”⁶ The Florida Supreme Court has articulated four issues to consider when determining whether a statute may be retroactively applied:

- Is the statute procedural or substantive?
- Was there an unambiguous legislative intent for retroactive application?
- Was [a person’s] right vested or inchoate?
- Is the application of [the statute] to these facts unconstitutionally retroactive?⁷

The general rule of statutory construction is that a procedural or remedial statute may operate retroactively, but that a substantive statute may not operate retroactively without clear legislative intent. Substantive laws either create or impose a new obligation or duty, or impair or destroy existing rights, and procedural laws enforce those rights or obligations.⁸ The effect of this bill would be to create a new right for firefighters’ beneficiaries and to create a new obligation for firefighters’ employers or employers’ insurers. Therefore, this bill appears to be substantive in nature.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

⁶ Norman J. Singer and J.D. Shamblé Singer, *Prospective or retroactive interpretation*, 2 SUTHERLAND STATUTORY CONSTR., s. 41:4 (6th ed. 2009).

⁷ *Weingrad v. Miles*, 2010 WL 711801, *2 (Fla. 3d DCA 2010) (internal citations omitted).

⁸ *See Alamo Rent-A-Car, Inc. v. Mancusi*, 632 So.2d 1352, 1358 (Fla. 1994); *In re Rules of Criminal Procedure*, 272 So.2d 65, 65 (Fla. 1972).

B. Private Sector Impact:

Additional death benefits are payable to the beneficiaries of firefighters who are killed during a training exercise or as a result of an injury during the performance of his or her duties. [These benefits include accidental death and dismemberment payments as well as the payment of specified health insurance premiums.]

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Division of State Fire Marshal may need to amend Rule 69A-64.002, F.A.C., to provide a definition for “training” as it pertains to section 112.191, F.S.

The Department of Management Services has determined that this bill will not have a fiscal impact on the Department.⁹ However, the impacts to local governments are not known at this time.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

The retroactivity clause is located in the effective date section of the bill, which will not be codified into statutory law. To prevent confusion, it may be preferable to relocate the retroactivity clause to the substantive provisions of the bill.

VIII. Additional Information:

- A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS/CS by General Government Appropriations on April 6, 2010:

This committee substitute clarifies the intent of the bill in that it addresses an issue of important state interest. It also clarifies that the bill applies retroactively to firefighter deaths occurring on or after November 1, 2003.

CS by Governmental Oversight and Accountability on March 17, 2010:

The committee substitute:

- Clarifies that the injury causing death which entitles the firefighter’s beneficiary to the \$150,000 adjusted death benefit payment must be caused by an unlawful and intentional act of another person.
- Changes the effective date of the bill to provide that the act will take effect upon becoming a law and will apply to firefighter deaths occurring on or after November 1, 2007.

⁹ Department of Management Services, *Senate Bill 202 Fiscal Analysis* (Feb. 5, 2010) (on file with the Senate Committee on Community Affairs).

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
