

The Florida Senate
PROFESSIONAL STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Banking and Insurance Committee

BILL: SB 876

INTRODUCER: Senator Baker

SUBJECT: Firefighting Training

DATE: February 26, 2007 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Peacock	Deffenbaugh	BI	Favorable
2.			CA	
3.			GA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 876 requires the Division of State Fire Marshal (Division) of the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to establish a free firefighter training program, covering basic training for voluntary firefighters and advanced training for all (including professional) firefighters. In respect to this program, the bill:

- provides for eligibility for training under the program;
- specifies criteria for training courses;
- requires the division to consult with the Firefighters Employment, Standards, and Training Council (Council) to develop the training courses;
- provides for reports, audits, and notice concerning the training program;
- authorizes rulemaking by the division;
- specifies the distribution of funds by the division to certified training centers;
- provides for administration of such funds by an advisory committee composed of certain persons appointed by the Council; and
- authorizes use of money from the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund.

The bill appropriates \$15,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the Division of State Fire Marshal in the Department of Financial Services for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this act during the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

This bill creates the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 633.381.

II. Present Situation:

State Fire Marshal; Florida State Fire College

The Department of Financial Services includes the Division of State Fire Marshal. This division consists of several bureaus of fire services including the Bureau of Fire Standards and Training (BFST or Bureau). Among other tasks, in regards to fire training this bureau is charged with:

- Providing regulatory authority and certification, renewals of certification, and testing for approximately 50,000 firefighters in over 500 fire-rescue departments in Florida;¹
- Providing certification testing for fire protection industry personnel; and
- Providing curriculum support, administrative and regulatory authority and certification testing for 31 certified fire training centers offering state certified training, for and to, the 21 community colleges offering fire science associate degrees.²

As its training function, the BFST operates the Florida State Fire College (FSFC) located near Ocala, Florida. The FSFC provides extensive training for both paid and volunteer firefighters with subjects ranging from basic fire fighting to advanced arson investigation. FSFC students are trained in life saving, rescue, and fire fighting techniques to prepare them for the rigors of actual emergencies. In addition to hosting numerous seminars on fire control, fire equipment, hazardous materials, and fire prevention, the FSFC conducts more than 200 regularly scheduled classes each year, reaching approximately 4,000 students. Also, the FSFC continues to expand upon one of its most important functions: field training, with instructors logging tens of thousands of student hours of instruction each year. In another effort to enhance the quality of training, the FSFC has established an industrial fire training program. This program has forged partnerships between governmental agencies and private businesses.

Through its standards function, the BFST governs the nearly 30 certified firefighter training centers located throughout the state, ensuring the facilities, the curriculum, and the instructors comply with state statutes and rules. Nearly a dozen advanced level competency certifications are offered, with applications, examinations, and renewals being processed, administered, and maintained by bureau staff. Field representatives of the Bureau administer examinations at the completion of training at each of the certified training centers, with competency examinations being offered quarterly at six regional testing sites, as well as monthly at the FSFC. The bureau also maintains the employment history of all full-time paid firefighters in the state, as well as administers the Firefighters Supplemental Compensation Program as outlined by state statute.³

Firefighter Training

There are two classifications of firefighters in the state of Florida, full-time professional, (or “career”) firefighters and volunteer firefighters. According to representatives of the Florida Firefighter Training Directors Association (FFTDA), there are approximately 10,000 volunteer firefighters and 22,000 professional firefighters in the state. Volunteer firefighters are required by rule to be certified as a Firefighter I, which requires completion of 160 hours of approved

¹ The Division of State Fire Marshal does not have an exact estimate of the total number of firefighters and indicates that this estimate may be high. The Florida Firefighters Training Directors Association estimates this number to be closer to 30,000.

² Florida Department of Financial Services Transition Guide 2007.

³ Division of State Fire Marshal, available at http://www.fldfs.com/SFM/bfst/bfst_index.htm.

training, based on requirements adopted by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).⁴ According to the FFTDA, the cost of completing this 160-hour training is typically \$500 or more. Payment for these courses are made from various sources, such as cities, counties, fundraisers, donations, or by the individual firefighter trainees themselves. To be classified as a professional firefighter in Florida, an individual must obtain certification as a Firefighter II. As established by s. 633.35, F.S., the Firefighter Minimum Standards Course consists of a minimum of 360-hours of training. The first 160-hours includes the NFPA Firefighter I and Florida specific requirements. The following 200-hours include NFPA Firefighter II and Florida specific requirements. The Firefighter Minimum Standards Course is offered at about 30 certified training centers located throughout the state. Each training center has its own course and fee schedule.

Following the Firefighter II certification, firefighters are eligible to enroll in advanced firefighter training. Some of these classes include: Pump Operator, Urban Search and Rescue, and First Line Supervisor (more commonly referred to as Lieutenant training). According to representatives of the FFTDA, prices for these courses can range from \$300 to upwards of \$1,000. Though some fire districts or departments are able to provide funding for advanced firefighter education, many are not, due to funding restrictions. According to the FFTDA, the training budget of the state's fire department has not been able to keep up with the growth of the departments.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 creates section 633.381, F.S., directing the Division of State Fire Marshal to establish a free firefighter training program for both professional and volunteer firefighters. Under this bill, a firefighter who works for an, "employing agency" (defined in s. 633.30(2), F.S., as a municipality, county, state, or political subdivision), for pay or as a volunteer, is eligible for advanced and specialized training if the training increases the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the firefighter. The free training would not be provided for the basic training required for certification as a professional firefighter, except for an active volunteer firefighter who enters into a binding agreement with an employing agency to remain with the employing agency for at least 2 years after completing training, subject to reimbursement if the firefighter departs before the end of the 2-year period.

The bill requires that each training course offered under the program be at least 4 hours in duration and taught by an instructor certified by the bureau under the auspices of a training center certified by the bureau. Each course provided under the program must be audited annually and a report of the audit must be furnished to the bureau and to the Firefighters Safety and Health Task Force. The bill further requires that each training facility under the program provide the division with a semiannual and year-end fiscal report. The division is required to regularly provide notice of the free training to each employing agency and state-certified firefighting training facility. The bill authorizes the division to adopt rules to administer the program.

The bill requires the Council to appoint an administrative committee for each certified training center to administer the funds that are distributed in the manner that best provides for the training

⁴ Rules 69A-62.003 and 69A-37.055, F.A.C.

needs of the firefighters served by that center. Moneys from the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund may be used to carry out the provisions of this section. The funds must be distributed to each training center on a per capita basis according to the number of volunteer and professional firefighters in the locality serviced by each training center.

Section 2 appropriates \$15,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the Division of State Fire Marshal in the Department of Financial Services for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this act during the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

Section 3 provides that the act shall take effect July 1, 2007.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Individuals who would otherwise be required to pay for the firefighting training funded by this bill would benefit. The \$15 million appropriation by this bill equates to \$500 for each of the approximately 30,000 firefighters in the state.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill appropriates \$15 million from the General Revenue Fund to provide free firefighter training across the state. Such funds would benefit those local jurisdictions that provide funding for the firefighter training authorized by this bill, i.e., basic training for volunteer firefighters and advanced training for professional firefighters. The funds must be distributed to each training center on a per capita basis according to the number of volunteer and professional firefighters in the locality serviced by each center.

The bill does not specify how the funds must be budgeted by each center, but according to the FFTDA, the training budget is based on the following expenditure formula: 80 percent for training (\$12 million), 15 percent for operating capital outlay (\$2.25

million), which can be defined as equipment, fixtures, furniture, computers, etc., and 5 percent for administrative costs (\$750,000).

The Department of Financial Services provides that this bill will have a negative impact on DFS, requiring the creation of at least two full-time employment positions (one supervisory and one clerical) and the use of other part-time position personnel for supervision, auditing, etc. Including salaries and benefits for these individuals, the DFS estimates the cost will be \$142,889 per year in addition to the recurring \$15,000,000 appropriation to fund firefighter training across the state.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

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