

By Senator Wright

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to first responders; amending s. 445.08, F.S.; renaming the Florida Law Enforcement Recruitment Bonus Payment Program as the Florida Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter Recruitment Bonus Payment Program; revising and defining terms; revising the program to include newly employed firefighters in the program; requiring the Department of Commerce to consult with the Division of State Fire Marshal to verify certain information; requiring the division to define firefighter misconduct by rule; revising the expiration date of specified provisions; amending s. 633.134, F.S.; authorizing the Chief Financial Officer to appoint review panels to assist in reviewing grants; providing for review panel membership; providing duties and responsibilities of each review panel; providing for general program support grants and specific fire program grants; requiring the Chief Financial Officer to review the panel's recommendations and, beginning on a specified date, include approved grant applicants in the Department of Financial Services' legislative budget request; requiring certain projects be funded until all appropriated funds are depleted; requiring the Division of State Fire Marshal to adopt certain rules; creating s. 633.1424, F.S.; defining the terms "first responder" and "public safety agency"; creating, subject to appropriation, the Institute for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder within the Department of

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Financial Services for a specified purpose; providing duties and responsibilities of the institute; authorizing the institute to collaborate with other entities to enhance program development and service delivery; requiring the Division of State Fire Marshal to adopt rules; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 445.08, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

445.08 Florida Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter Recruitment Bonus Payment Program.—

(1) As used in ~~For the purposes of~~ this section, the term:

(a) "Break in service" means:

1. A period of time during which a person is employed with a Florida criminal justice agency or fire service provider but is not employed as a full-time law enforcement officer or firefighter; or

2. A period of time during which a person is in between employment as a full-time law enforcement officer or firefighter lasting no longer than 15 days.

The time period for any break in service does not count toward satisfying the 2-year full-time employment requirement of this section.

(b) ~~(a)~~ "Commission" means the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission within the Department of Law Enforcement.

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59 (c)~~(b)~~ "Employing agency" has the same meaning as ~~provided~~
60 in s. 943.10(4).

61 (d) "Fire service provider" has the same meaning as in s.
62 633.102(13).

63 (e) "Firefighter" has the same meaning as in s. 633.102(9).

64 (f)~~(e)~~ "Law enforcement officer" has the same meaning as
65 ~~provided~~ in s. 943.10(1).

66 (g) "Newly employed firefighter" means a person who gains
67 or is appointed to full-time employment as a certified
68 firefighter with a fire service provider on or after July 1,
69 2026, and who has never been previously employed as a
70 firefighter in this state.

71 (h)~~(d)~~ "Newly employed officer" means a person who gains or
72 is appointed to full-time employment as a certified law
73 enforcement officer with a Florida criminal justice employing
74 agency on or after July 1, 2022, and who has never before been
75 employed as a law enforcement officer in this state.

76 (i)~~(e)~~ "Program" means the Florida Law Enforcement Officer
77 and Firefighter Recruitment Bonus Payment Program.

78 (2)(a) There is created within the department the Florida
79 Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter Recruitment Bonus
80 Payment Program to aid in the recruitment of law enforcement
81 officers and firefighters within the state. The purpose of the
82 program is to administer one-time bonus payments of up to \$5,000
83 to each newly employed officer and newly employed firefighter
84 within the state.

85 (b) Bonus payments provided to eligible newly employed
86 officers and newly employed firefighters are contingent upon
87 legislative appropriations and shall be prorated subject to the

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amount appropriated for the program.

(3) Each bonus payment shall be adjusted to include 7.65 percent for the officer's or firefighter's share of Federal Insurance Contribution Act tax on the payment.

(4) The department shall develop an annual plan for the administration of the program and distribution of bonus payments. Applicable employing agencies and fire service providers shall assist the department with the collection of any data necessary to determine bonus payment amounts and to distribute the bonus payments, and shall otherwise provide the department with any information or assistance needed to fulfill the requirements of this section. At a minimum, the plan must include:

(a) The method for determining the estimated number of newly employed officers and newly employed firefighters to gain or be appointed to full-time employment during the applicable fiscal year.

(b) The minimum eligibility requirements a newly employed officer and newly employed firefighter must meet to receive and retain a bonus payment, which must include:

1. Obtaining certification for employment or appointment as a law enforcement officer under ~~pursuant to~~ s. 943.1395 or as a firefighter under s. 633.408.

2. Gaining full-time employment with a Florida criminal justice agency or a fire service provider.

3. Maintaining full-time employment as a law enforcement officer with a Florida criminal justice agency or as a firefighter with a fire service provider for at least 2 years after ~~from~~ the date on which the officer or firefighter obtained

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certification. The required 2-year employment period may be satisfied by maintaining full-time employment at one or more employing agencies or fire service providers, but such period must not contain any break in service longer than 180 calendar days.

(c) The standards by which the department will determine under what circumstances a break in service is acceptable. A law enforcement officer or firefighter must provide documentation to the department justifying a break in service. ~~For purposes of this section, the term "break in service" means a period of time during which the person is employed with a Florida criminal justice agency but is not employed as a full-time law enforcement officer or a period of time during which the person is in between employment as a full-time law enforcement officer for no longer than 15 days. The time period for any break in service does not count toward satisfying the 2-year full-time employment requirement of this section.~~

(d) The method that will be used to determine the bonus payment amount to be distributed to each newly employed officer and newly employed firefighter.

(e) The method that will be used to distribute bonus payments to applicable employing agencies and fire service providers for distribution to eligible officers and firefighters. Such method should prioritize distributing bonus payments to eligible officers and firefighters in the most efficient and quickest manner possible.

(f) The estimated cost to the department associated with developing and administering the program and distributing bonus payment funds.

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146 (g) The method by which an officer or a firefighter must
147 reimburse the state if he or she received a bonus payment under
148 the program, but failed to maintain continuous employment for
149 the required 2-year period. Reimbursement may ~~shall~~ not be
150 required if an officer or a firefighter is discharged by his or
151 her employing agency or fire service provider for a reason other
152 than misconduct as designated on the affidavit of separation
153 completed by the employing agency or fire service provider and
154 maintained by the commission.

155
156 The department may establish other criteria deemed necessary to
157 determine bonus payment eligibility and distribution.

158 (5) The department shall consult quarterly with the
159 commission and the Division of State Fire Marshal to verify the
160 certification of newly employed officers and newly employed
161 firefighters and affidavits of separation submitted to the
162 commission and Division of State Fire Marshal which detail
163 officer or firefighter misconduct. The Division of State Fire
164 Marshal shall define by rule firefighter misconduct.

165 (6) The department shall submit the plan to the Executive
166 Office of the Governor's Office of Policy and Budget, the chair
167 of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the chair of the
168 House Appropriations Committee by October 1 of each year. The
169 department is authorized to submit budget amendments pursuant to
170 chapter 216 as necessary to release appropriated funds for
171 distribution to applicable employing agencies and fire service
172 providers under this program.

173 (7) The funding allocation for the bonus payments must be
174 used solely to comply with the requirements of this section, but

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applicable collective bargaining units are not otherwise precluded from wage negotiation.

(8) The department shall adopt rules to implement this section.

(9) This section expires July 1, 2028 ~~2026~~.

Section 2. Section 633.134, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

633.134 Gifts and grants; grant review panel.—

(1) The division may accept for any of its purposes and functions any donations of property and grants of money from any governmental unit, public agency, institution, person, firm, or corporation. Such moneys shall be deposited, disbursed, and administered in a trust fund as provided by law.

(2)(a) The Chief Financial Officer may appoint review panels to assist in the grant review process. A review panel must consist of five members from the fire service industry or other professions that involve the specific industry or program for which the panel has been appointed. Each member of a review panel is appointed to a 1-year term.

(b) Each review panel must review and score grant applications and recommend to the department which applicants should be awarded a grant. Each panel must submit to the department a list of eligible applicants by score.

(c) Each review panel must hold a forum for public comment before recommending a grant application.

(d) Each review panel must review the lists of eligible applicants for a grant and create two lists, one of which must consist of recommendations for eligible applicants for general program support grants and one of which must consist of

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204 recommendations for eligible applicants for specific fire
205 project grants, and submit the lists to the Chief Financial
206 Officer.

207 (e) A general program support grant or a specific fire
208 program grant includes, but is not limited to, all of the
209 following:

210 1. Grants for the purchase, replacement, or maintenance of
211 operational equipment and resources, including, but not limited
212 to, fire apparatuses, personal protective equipment,
213 communication systems, rescue tools, and other essential
214 firefighting and emergency response equipment.

215 2. Grants pertaining to fixed capital outlay, grants and
216 aids, and grants and aids to local governments and nonstate
217 entities-fixed capital outlay, as those terms are defined in s.
218 216.011(1), and the construction or remodel of fire departments.

219 3. Grants to support state-coordinated outreach programs
220 such as mobile fire safety exhibits, educational tours, and
221 statewide fire awareness campaigns. An outreach program must
222 prioritize grant funds to Florida-based fire departments, safety
223 educators, and emergency personnel and promote best practices in
224 fire prevention, public safety, and emergency preparedness.

225 4. Grants or stipends for individual firefighters or fire
226 service instructors selected through a competitive process based
227 on merit, leadership, or innovation in fire safety. Grant funds
228 may support training, research, or professional exchange
229 opportunities that advance public safety practices in this
230 state.

231 5. Grants for programs or projects that advance the mission
232 of fire prevention and emergency response, including, but not

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limited to, firefighter health and wellness initiatives, emergency planning and coordination systems, public safety communications upgrades, or community preparedness efforts. A program or project must clearly demonstrate alignment with the goals of this subsection and provide measurable public safety outcomes.

6. Grants for programs or projects that advance the mission of arson prevention, arson investigation, juvenile arson prevention, arson intervention programs, and police canine programs. Eligible recipients include entities that investigate or prevent arson. As used in this subparagraph, the term "police canine" has the same meaning as in s. 401.254(1).

(f) The Chief Financial Officer shall review the review panel's recommendations and, beginning January 1, 2027, submit a list of approved applicants to be included in the department's legislative budget request. Projects from the Chief Financial Officer's approved list must be funded by score until all appropriated funds are depleted.

(g) The division shall adopt rules to implement and administer this subsection, including rules establishing:

1. Eligibility criteria and the scoring rubric for the awarding of grants.

2. Particular grant programs or projects, categories of grants, and procedures necessary for the prudent administration of the grant programs or projects.

Section 3. Section 633.1424, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

633.1424 Institute for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.—

(1) As used in this section, the term:

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(a) "First responder" has the same meaning as in s.
125.01045(2).

(b) "Public safety agency" has the same meaning as in s.
365.172(3).

(2) Subject to appropriation, the Institute for
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is established within the
Department of Financial Services to serve as a statewide center
for research, training, outreach, and program development in
support of first responder behavioral health. The purpose of the
institute is to strengthen the mental resilience and well-being
of the state's public safety workforce through coordination of
research, training initiatives, public outreach, and policy
guidance.

(3) The institute must do all of the following:

(a) Coordinate statewide research efforts on behavioral
health issues, including suicide prevention, burnout reduction,
and resilience-building, which affect first responders.

(b) Develop and disseminate evidence-informed best
practices and policy recommendations relating to first responder
behavioral health.

(c) Facilitate training programs and technical assistance
in behavioral health initiatives for public safety agencies.

(d) Serve as a central hub for public outreach and
awareness campaigns aimed at improving mental health outcomes
for first responders.

(e) Evaluate behavioral health programs and initiatives to
measure their effectiveness and their impact on first
responders.

(4) The initiative may collaborate with public and private

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291 partners, including, but not limited to, Florida College System
292 institutions, state universities, public safety agencies, mental
293 health providers, and community organizations, to enhance
294 program development and service delivery.

295 (5) The division shall adopt rules to implement this
296 section.

297 Section 4. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.