

## FIREFIGHTER TRAINING FOR 16-YEAR OLDS

Mitchell Bean, Director  
Phone: (517) 373-8080  
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

Senate Bill 212 as reported from House Committee

Sponsor: Sen. Roger Kahn, M.D.

House Committee: Local, Intergovernmental, and Regional Affairs

Senate Committee: Local Government and Elections

### First Analysis (5-27-11)

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The bill would permit a fire department to partner with a school district to establish a Boy Scout Explorer post, enabling a state-certified instructor to provide the 240-hour firefighter training course to young men and women who, upon completion, would be provisionally licensed until age 18 when they could begin fighting fires.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The bill would appear to have no effect on state revenues or expenditures. The bill's impact on local units would depend on how expanding training classes are funded. The bill says costs are to be borne by the fire department or by the individuals taking the courses and exam. The bill is permissive, and it is not known how many fire departments and affiliated organizations would participate.

### THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to the fire chief of the Maple Grove Fire Department in Saginaw County, fire departments across the state are having difficulty recruiting and retaining people who will serve as volunteer or part-time firefighters.

In order to interest young people in joining the fire service, some fire departments participate in a program affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America, called Fire Service Exploring. This program, which is open to both boys and girls, offers hands-on experience to those interested in fire service careers. To participate, a fire department establishes an Exploring unit insured by the Boy Scouts of American (sometimes called an Exploring post). Then a state-certified instructor offers the Bureau of Fire Services 227-hour firefighter training course to 16- and 17-year-olds. See **Background information**. Completion of the course earns students a provisional license that enables them to assist with fire-duty (for example, running errands at the fire scene for the fire chief, or cleaning and maintaining firefighting equipment and the fire hall) until they turn 18-years of age. At age 18, students can exchange their provisional license for a life-time adult license, and begin fighting fires.

To encourage expansion of the Exploring program, legislation has been introduced that enables school districts to partner with fire departments and, with approval of the State Board of Education, give credit for the training.

### THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would create a new act to do the following:

\*\*Permit a fire department to establish a Boy Scout Explorer post for the purpose of firefighter training.

\*\*Permit a school district or other entity to affiliate with a fire department to allow individuals who are 16 years of age or older to participate in firefighter training courses and the firefighter exam.

\*\*Allow a school board to apply for authorization to hire a non-certificated person to teach firefighter I and II courses.

More specifically, under the bill an organized fire department that administered the firefighter I and II courses, as well as the firefighter examination, could establish a Boy Scouts of America Explorer Post within the department for young people 16 years of age or older.

Then, an "affiliated organization" could partner with the fire department to allow individuals 16 years of age or older to participate in the firefighter I or II courses, and to take the firefighter examination. (The bill would define "affiliated organization" to mean a school district, organized fire department, or other entity.)

Further, the bill specifies that the governing board of a local or intermediate school district could apply to the State Board of Education under Section 1233b of the Revised School Code (described below), to receive a permit or annual authorization, in order to engage a full- or part-time non-certificated, non-endorsed teacher to teach firefighter I or II courses. An individual engaged as a teacher would have to be certified as provided in the Firefighters Training Council Act, and the examination for a course taught by a teacher engaged under the bill would have to be administered as provided in that act.

Finally, the bill would not require the State Fire Marshal or the Office of Fire Fighter Training to pay or contribute any funds--other than those already imposed under the Firefighters Training Council Act--for the administration of the courses or the examinations. Instead, any additional costs would be borne by the fire department, or the individuals taking the courses and exam.

(Note: Section 1233b of the Revised School Code allows a school board to engage a non-certificated, non-endorsed teacher to teach a course in a specified subject, including math, chemistry, and robotics, or in another subject area determined by the State Board to be appropriate, in grades 9 through 12. As a rule, this applies only if the district cannot engage a certificated, endorsed teacher. A non-certificated, non-endorsed teacher must have a bachelor's degree and have a major or graduate degree in the field of specialization he or she will teach; if the teacher wishes to teach more than one year, he or she must have passed a basic skills exam and, if one exists, a subject area exam in the field of specialization he or she will teach.)

#### ***HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:***

The House Committee on Local, Intergovernmental, and Regional Affairs reported out the Senate-passed version of Senate Bill 212, without amendments.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Office of Fire Fighter Training is located in the Bureau of Fire Services, within what is now the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs.

The Office describes firefighter I and II training as follows: *"The Fire Fighter I & II course is structured for competency-based group instruction of the Fire Fighter I and Fire Fighter II information presented in the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), Essentials of Fire Fighting, Fourth Edition. It addresses the objectives covered in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1001...and objectives related to Competencies for the First Responder at the Awareness Level Chapter 2, and Operational Level Chapter 3, of NFPA 472..."*

The course requires 227 hours of instruction. For certification, students must attain a minimum grade of 70 percent on a written final exam and successfully complete a practical skills exam. As a rule, a person taking the course must be at least 18-years-old, and be either a member of an organized Michigan fire department or a pre-service student registered through a recognized college- or university-based regional training center. Exceptions apply to individuals sponsored by a fire department cadet program or fire department Boy Scouts of America Explorer program; cadets and Explorer students must be 16 or 17 years old. (Some information in this analysis is derived from the Senate Fiscal Agency analysis dated 4-15-11.)

## **ARGUMENTS:**

### **For:**

According to committee testimony, a shortage of volunteer firefighters exists, statewide. This bill would enable (but not require) local communities to offer fire-fighter training to high school students--both boys and girls--by establishing a Fire Explorer program (sponsored and insured by the Boy Scouts of America) through a partnership between their school district and the fire department. Under the bill, schools could offer the 227-hour firefighter training course as an elective for credit, if the State Board of Education approved non-certificated, non-endorsed teachers for the course. The training could be offered at a school, a vocational skills center, or a fire department.

According to the State Fire Marshal, approximately 75 percent of Michigan is protected by volunteer or part-time firefighters. It can be difficult, however, for fire departments to recruit and retain people unless their interest is captured at a young age. The training can be demanding, and when men and women have reached their mid-20s or 30s, they have other commitments and are involved in other activities. If 16- and 17-year-olds participated in firefighter training through their school, and found firefighting to be interesting and rewarding, they could join a department when they turned 18--the age one must be in order to fight fires.

In addition to potentially expanding the ranks of firefighters, students taking the firefighter I and II course would learn about teamwork, responsibility, community involvement, and assisting others. And, according to committee testimony, the training also motivates some students at risk of dropping-out, to stay in high school through

graduation.

***Against:***

No positions against the bill were advanced.

***POSITIONS:***

The Maple Grove Fire Department supports the bill. (5-26-11)

The Michigan Fire Service Coalition supports the bill. (5-26-11)

The Michigan Townships Association supports the bill. (5-26-11)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault

---

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.