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Senate Bill 212 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Roger Kahn, M.D.
Committee: Local Government and Elections

Date Completed: 4-15-11

RATIONALE

Fire departments in Michigan apparently are having difficulty recruiting and retaining individuals who will serve as volunteer or part-time firefighters. In order to interest people at a young age, some fire departments participate in a program affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America, called Fire Service Exploring. This program offers hands-on experience for young men and women who might be interested in fire service careers. The participating fire departments establish Exploring units, called posts, to offer firefighter training to 16- and 17-year-olds. Some people believe, however, that the Exploring program is not available to a large-enough number of students. It has been suggested that more students would take advantage of the training if school districts partnered with fire departments and, with approval of the State Board of Education, gave credit for the training.

CONTENT

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

- **Permit a fire department to establish a Boy Scout Explorer post.**
- **Permit a school district or other entity to affiliate with a fire department to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to participate in firefighter training courses and the firefighter exam.**
- **Allow a school board to apply for authorization to hire a noncertificated person to teach firefighter I and II courses.**

Specifically, an organized fire department administering a firefighter I and II course and a firefighter examination could establish a Boy Scouts of America Explorer post within its department for individuals 16 or 17 years of age.

An affiliated organization that was not an organized fire department could affiliate with an organized fire department for the purpose of allowing 16- or 17-year-olds to participate in the firefighter I or II course and the firefighter examination. ("Affiliated organization" would mean a school district, organized fire department, or other entity.)

The 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) for a permit or annual authorization to engage a full- or part-time noncertificated, nonendorsed 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.

The proposed act would not require the State Fire Marshal or the Office of Fire Fighter Training to pay or contribute any funds for the administration of the course or the examinations that were in addition to any exams or costs already imposed under the Firefighters Training Council Act. The fire department or the individual taking the course and exam would have to bear any additional costs.

(Section 1233b of the Revised School Code allows a school board to engage a noncertificated, nonendorsed 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 noncertificated, nonendorsed 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.)

BACKGROUND

The Office of Fire Fighter Training in the Bureau of Fire Services, Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth, 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% 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 preservice 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.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Few schools offer firefighter training, and students might not be aware of the Fire Service Exploring program, or may find that it is not offered at a convenient time or place, particularly in rural areas. Many more students might participate in the training it were available through their schools in affiliation with fire departments. Also, additional students might be motivated to take the training if it qualified for credit toward high school graduation. Under the bill, schools could offer firefighter training as an elective for credit, if the State Board of Education approved noncertificated, nonendorsed 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% 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.

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. The training also could help motivate students to stay in school—something especially important now that the dropout age has been raised to 18.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no effect on State revenue or expenditure. The bill would have a minimal impact on local unit revenue and expenditures, and only to the extent that the cost of expanding training classes would

increase costs and/or revenue. It is unknown how many fire departments and affiliated organizations would engage in activities allowed under the bill.

Fiscal Analyst: David Zin

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.