

The
Washington

Fire Chief

Spring 2021

The official publication of the Washington Fire Chiefs



**WASHINGTON
FIRE CHIEFS**



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A report from the Washington Fire Chiefs President

Mark Correira, President
Washington Fire Chiefs

A Year in Review

Year Review

The year - 2020 - will be a year that will be branded in everyone's mind for a very long time. When the first Covid-19 patient in the United States arrived in Everett on January 20, 2020, followed by the outbreak in the Kirkland Nursing Home on February 28, Ground Zero was established for a cascade of events that will change the fire service for a very long time.

2020 was also the year of significant change for the Washington Fire Chiefs Association. It was the year former Executive Director Wayne Senter retired, and Steve Wright assumed this role. Wayne was a seasoned fire service leader who built strong relationships with

fire service partners and allowed the Association to thrive. Like many previous leaders, he left the Association better than he found it.

Sustainability

When Steve assumed the role of Executive Director in 2020, he hit the ground running. He quickly realized that a few changes needed to be made if the organization was to continue to be successful. First, because the Association's Conferences were canceled due to COVID restrictions, he recognized the need to change the long-established dues structure. Historically, the Association relied on Conference revenue to offset the operational

costs - an unsustainable model. With the change in dues structure, Steve has developed a plan to move the Association into a stronger financial position.

Improved Communication

The Association also embarked on improving communication with the different stakeholders throughout 2020. Under Steve's leadership, the Association developed a plan for more transparency and better communication with all local agencies. From one-on-one meetings with fire chiefs to County Association President's meeting, the Association is more transparent and accessible than ever before.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

In 2020, an initiative that I am most proud of was the Association's attention to fire service diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In 2018, only 8% of career firefighters nationwide were female, and 18% were people of color. This falls short compared to other similar professions like law enforcement (12% female, 27% people of color) and the military (15% female, 40% people of color). To begin addressing this, the Association assembled a DEI Committee made of passionate fire service

professionals whose goal is to make a difference to this fire service landscape. They have evaluated the Association's current policies, procedures, and website. They have developed a work plan to begin supporting agencies that want to make a difference in their departments. Julie Oberg (Spokane) is leading this effort, and I am confident she and the DEI Committee team will move the needle on fire service diversity in the State.

Future Plans

As we emerge from the

pandemic in 2021, this new normal will set the stage for the future. This year has proven the strength of the Fire Service and how we can adapt to whatever is thrown at us. I am so very proud of the Washington Fire Service and the resiliency it has shown. I am also very proud and thankful for the leadership and adaptability Steve, Kathleen, and Elisa made in 2020. I am confident the Association is stronger than it has ever been, and the future is bright. It has been an honor and privilege to serve all of you as the President of the Washington Fire Chiefs.



SAVE THE DATE

Washington Fire Chiefs Conference

2022

Headquarters at the Coast Wenatchee Hotel
Event at the Wenatchee Convention Center
Wenatchee, Washington

May 23rd-26th, 2022

Event information will be posted on the WFC website:
www.washingtonfirechiefs.org

A report from the Washington Fire Chiefs Lobbyist

2021 Session Review

The 2021 Legislature adjourned Sine Die on Sunday, April 25th, the 105th and final day of the session. Prior to adjourning, lawmakers passed a number of significant pieces of legislation ranging from climate policy (cap & trade, low carbon fuel standards) to police reform (tactics, use of force standards, state oversight, independent prosecutions), as well as a first-step toward changing the overall tax structure in Washington with a capital gains tax. Major efforts were also made to address the recent State Supreme Court Decision regarding possession of controlled substances (the Blake decision). Work remains on transportation, however, and could potentially lead to a special session later this year.

Operating Budget & Federal COVID Relief

Lawmakers enacted a roughly \$59 billion state operating budget prior to adjourning. With over \$3 billion in new revenue from more robust tax collection than previously expected, as well as over \$4 billion in federal COVID-relief dollars, the state was able to make significant investments in a number of areas. Below are specific budget notes of interest to the fire service, followed by high-level examples of priority spending and savings items in this year's budget:

JATC Funding

\$700,000 of the fire service training account—state appropriation is provided solely for the firefighter apprenticeship training program.

- The joint apprenticeship training committee shall submit a report to the fiscal committees of the legislature by December 1, 2022, describing how the funding appropriated in this section was spent during the biennium. At a minimum, the report shall include information about the number of individuals that completed the training, the level of training or type of training being taught, the total cost of training everyone through completion, the percentage of passage rate for trainees, and the geographic location of the fire department sponsoring the trainee.

Fire Service Mobilization

- \$18.47 million to backfill from last year's wildfire season
- A slightly increased placeholder amount of \$8.5 million (instead of the usual \$8) for the coming wildland season (no language concerning pre-positioning or early deployment)

Safe Stations Pilot Program

\$200,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022, \$195,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023, and \$755,000 of the general fund—federal appropriation are provided solely for a grant program to award funding to fire departments in the state of Washington to implement safe station pilot programs. Programs that combine the safe station approach with fire department mobile integrated health programs such as the community assistance referral and education services program under RCW 35.21.930 are encouraged.

Certified substance use disorder peer specialists may be employed in a safe station pilot program if the authority determines that a plan is in place to provide appropriate levels of supervision and technical support. Safe station pilot programs shall collaborate with behavioral health administrative services organizations, local crisis providers, and other stakeholders to develop a streamlined process for referring safe station clients to the appropriate level of care. Funding for pilot programs under this subsection shall be used for new or expanded programs and may not be used to supplant existing funding.

Helmet Distribution Program

\$20,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and \$20,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 are provided solely for a helmet distribution program in order to reduce traumatic brain injuries throughout the state. Of these amounts:

- (a) \$10,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and \$10,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 are provided solely for a grant to the Washington fire chiefs association to provide helmets to persons contacted by an official of a local fire department for not wearing a helmet while riding a skateboard or bicycle; and
- (b) \$10,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and \$10,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 are provided solely to the Washington association of sheriffs



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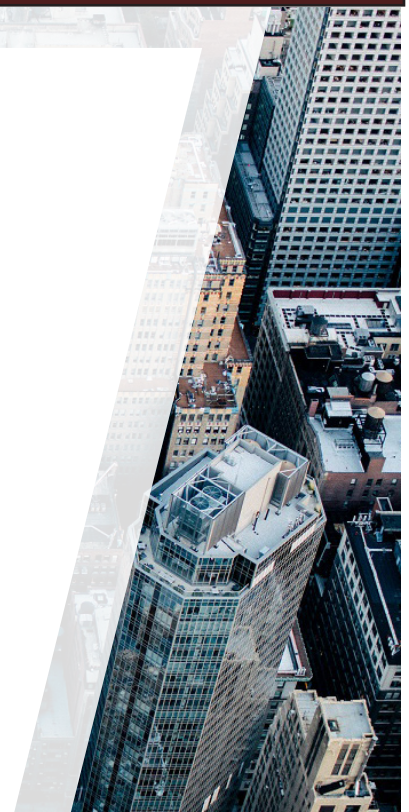
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and police chiefs to distribute to local law enforcement agencies to provide helmets to persons contacted by an official of a local law enforcement agency for not wearing a helmet while riding a skateboard or bicycle.

DNR Forest Management and Wildfire Mitigation

\$125 million in state funds for wildfire preparedness, prevention, and protection activities

Federal Funding Appropriations

- \$1.7 billion for school reopening, addressing learning loss, and other allowable costs under Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief
- \$1.1 billion for the vaccine deployment, recruitment of public health workers, contact tracing and testing • \$658 million to extend the state's rental assistance program
- \$528 million for childcare grants and provider rates
- \$500 million in state funds for Unemployment Insurance benefit relief
- \$340 million for grants to adults who have been impacted by COVID-19 but are unable to access other benefits due to their citizenship status
- \$187 million to help prevent foreclosure for individuals under 100% area median income
- \$170 million for family leave during the period of the pandemic

General Spending Items

- \$800 million in state funds for expenditure into the Teachers Retirement System Plan 1 fund to reduce the unfunded actuarial accrued liability of the fund
- \$664 million in state and federal funds to increase rates for certain Medicaid providers
- \$602 million in state and federal funds to restore health care related savings
- \$517 million in state and federal funds to increase behavioral health services, including provider rate increases, community supports, and crisis teams
- \$454 million in state and federal funds for personal care, family support

and other services for low-income individuals living in community settings

- \$309 million in state and federal funds for learning recovery, educational technology, and stabilization funding for public schools
- \$298 million in state and federal funds to fund the Fair Start Act, which includes a variety of early learning and childcare initiatives
- \$292 million in state funds for housing, rental, and related services
- \$261 million in state funds to implement the working families tax credit
- \$147 million in state funds for the Foundational Public Health initiative

2021 Legislation of Interest – Bills Passing the Legislature

Despite the limitations of a virtual legislative session, lawmakers were busy working on a number of significant policy proposals that will have lasting impacts for years to come. Below is a short list of bills that passed the Legislature this session that are of interest to the fire service.

Wildland Policy

- o HB 1168 (Springer), DNR Forest Health and Wildfire Mitigation – Priority legislation from the Commissioner of Public Lands and many fire service professionals, HB 1168 creates the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account (Account) to fund certain wildfire preparedness, prevention, and protection activities and requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to report every two years on how Account funds are used. The bill requires the DNR to implement a variety of wildfire preparedness, prevention, and forest health initiatives including increasing coordination with various entities, developing a forest health work force, providing an aviation support program, creating a small forest landowner forest health program, and exploring and developing markets for woody biomass residuals from forest health treatments.

Behavioral Health/Crisis Response

- o HB 1477 (Orwall), Implementing the 988 System – Directs the Department of Health to designate crisis hotline centers that meet standards related to technology and the ability to identify and deploy community crisis resources for persons experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Establishes the Crisis Response Improvement Strategy Committee to develop a comprehensive assessment of the behavioral health crisis services system and a recommended vision for an integrated crisis network throughout Washington. Requires that health plans and medical assistance programs provide coverage for next day appointments for enrollees experiencing urgent, symptomatic behavioral health conditions, beginning in 2023. Establishes the Statewide 988 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Line Tax on phone lines to fund the crisis hotline centers and response services. Makes several appropriations to increase capacity for the existing crisis call centers and begin implementation of the crisis call center hub system and supporting technology.

Fire Commissioner Boards

- o HB 1159 (Berg), Concerning the Number of Fire District Commissioners – Allows a fire protection district board of commissioners with five members to increase to seven members if approved by a majority of voters.

Local Government Revenue

- o HB 1189 (Duerr), Tax Increment Financing – Authorizes local governments to designate tax increment financing areas and to use increased local property tax collections to fund public improvements.

Two fire service amendments were adopted to mitigate concerns relating to possible reductions in funding to fire districts should a TIF district be created. First, if a project analysis indicates that an increment area

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will impact at least 20 percent of assessed value in a fire district, they must negotiate mitigation strategies. Second, if a fire service agency's annual report demonstrates an increase in the level of service directly related to the increment area, the local government must negotiate a mitigation plan with the fire protection district or RFA to address level of service issues in the increment area.

Presumptive Occupational Disease

- o SB 5115 (Keiser), Establishing health emergency labor standards – Creates an occupational disease presumption for frontline employees during a public health emergency for the purposes of workers' compensation. Requires employers to notify L&I when a certain percentage of their workforce becomes infected during a public health emergency. Requires employers to provide written notice to employees on the premises and their union of potential exposure to the infectious or contagious disease during a public health emergency. Prohibits discrimination against an employee who is high risk for seeking accommodation that protects them from the disease or using all available leave options if no accommodation is reasonable.

Bills Not Passing the Legislature

A number of bills failed to cross the

finish line in 2021, all of which will be automatically reintroduced in 2022, the second year of the two-year legislative cycle. Below is a short list of bills that did not pass but that will be up for discussion again next session.

Local Government Finances

- o HB 1362 (Duerr), Property Tax Growth Limit – Changes the 101 percent revenue growth limit to 100 percent plus population changes and inflation, with a limit of 103 percent.
- o SB 5341 (Wilson, J.), Local Sales Tax Uses – Expands the allowable uses of a portion of revenues raised from the local sales and use tax for public safety to include emergency medical services purposes.
- o HB 1505 (Walsh), Funding Flexibility for Ambulance Service Training – Clarifying that providing ambulance services in chapter 36.57 RCW includes the ability for the transportation authority to pay for training for the people that will provide the ambulance services.

Open Public Meetings Act

- o HB 1056 (Pollet), OPMA Flexibility During Declared Emergencies – Allows a public agency to hold meetings of its governing body remotely or with limited in-person attendance after a declared emergency. Requires that the public be allowed to listen in real time and at no cost to meetings that are held remotely or with limited in-person attendance.

Requires all public agencies, except for certain special purpose districts, cities, and towns, to post agendas online for regular meetings and for special meetings held remotely or with limited in-person attendance.

Employment Liability

- o HB 1341 (Bronoske), Professional Rescue Doctrine – Abolishes the professional rescue doctrine that precludes a professional rescuer from recovering for injuries inherently within the scope of a particular rescue activity.
- o HB 1076 (Hansen), Qui Tam Action – Allows whistleblowers to bring legal actions on behalf of the state for violations of workplace protections.

Pension Reform

- o SB 5453 (Schoesler), Merging LEOFF 1 and TERS 1 – Merges the assets, liabilities, and membership of the Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' retirement system Plan 1 with the teachers' retirement system Plan 1 into a new merged plan with two benefit tiers. Increases LEOFF 2 benefit enhancements.

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Creating a Cultural Shift for the Fire Service & EMS: Clearing the Path

*By Stephen Odom, PhD
 Founder & Chief Officer, First Responder
 Wellness and Shift Wellness*

Fire departments spend significant training time and resources preparing for and then responding to calls that range from the catastrophic to the mundane. The continual training is intended to mitigate risk to your crews and to effectively serve the public. Strategic, tactical, and physical excellence are ongoing objectives to the success of the mission. Yet often missing from this success formula are the strategies and tactics needed to manage the cumulative cognitive and emotional effects of the relentless exposure to repetitive, traumatic, and disturbing events witnessed and intervened upon daily. Additionally, the price of vigilance, sleep interruptions, exhaustion, and all that awaits the crew members at home after extended periods away are rarely entered into the cost equation.

Dealing with stress and trauma is part of the job. Unfortunately, chronic exposure to highly stressful and traumatic situations is known to have a significantly negative impact on mental health and wellbeing in a myriad of ways, in fact, 85% of responders experience mental

health signs and symptoms that are in many ways a normal response to the job.

While the average civilian can experience a few traumatic events in their lifetime, your crews become accustomed to acute trauma, and even though “de-sensitized,” there are underlying physical, emotional and “hypersensitized” brain changes that result from exposure and exhaustion of the body and mind. Most do not realize they are experiencing the gradually increasing signs and symptoms of a stress disorder, as it has only recently come into Fire Service awareness that the way we feel is not normal or healthy. The average firefighter mortality age is 10-15 years sooner than the U.S. average (meaning between ages 58-62)² - what happened to a long walk into the sunset?

The cumulative and residual effects of continually caring for others is a point of pride for firefighters and paramedics, but that pride can also be detrimental to mental health by not prioritizing one’s own emotional and mental self-care, or as the lexicon evolves, Brain Health. The cultural imperative that tells firefighters to tough



it out, rub some dirt on it, and drink some beers only perpetuates the myth that an iron will and drinking to forget works.

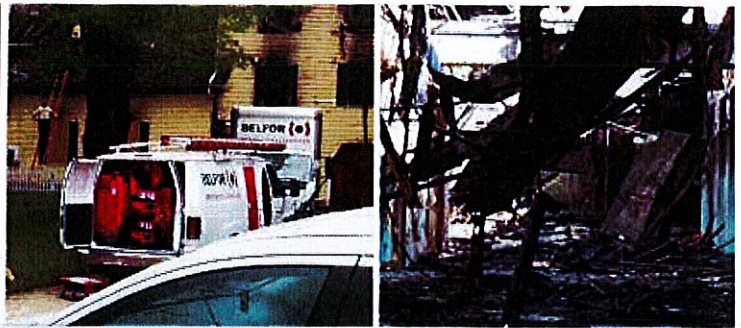
Over the past few years, a symptom-management approach has begun to take hold, where prescriptions for testosterone and Adderall have skyrocketed for responders and are viewed by many as tactics to boost energy, strength, and focus (along with insomnia). The long-term effects of both are the opposite of the goals, along with an addiction to either or both. Something more fundamental and permanent needs to happen.

You’ve probably seen the data on Firefighter and EMS suicide completion: an increase of 35% from 2018 to 2019 (103 to 139)³ and we all know those numbers are underreported by

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- Shoring and moving of materials to help secure safe entry of fire department and authorized personnel.
- Provide lighting, dumpsters, emergency power, etc.
- Application of board-up decals if required to reduce visual eyesore of burned structures.

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disguised suicides. This data is devastating. What are we supposed to do? As leaders, our mission and job description are straightforward, but complicated and challenging:

- take care of our people,
- get the job done safely,
- provide a clear path,
- obtain and direct resources,
- reduce injuries and liability,
- self-assess, improve, and continue

Ask yourself a question, how much do we invest in a single firefighter over the course of a career? How much of those resources go towards resilience, mental health, and peer support awareness and training? How many employees have we had to separate from the department due to disciplinary, job performance, or legal issues, or lost to an avoidable circumstance (think suicide, alcoholism, etc.)? When any of those realities occur, you've lost your "investment" and must start over. According to NFPA research, the Fire Service has an annual turnover rate of 25%⁴ - what percentage of those are mental health and substance misuse issues (often in disguise)?

So what's a Chief to do? Follow your job description: Obtain and have available the right resources. Whether its counseling and EAP services or intensive treatment, be very wary of those who will state they care for First Responders

– make them prove it. Your people will generally allow for a single negative encounter, and then and it's game over – "I tried it, it doesn't work for me." Working with organizations that have both expertise and cultural competency to understand and work with your departments and their families is critical. Stories abound of responders seeking counseling or treatment, only to be put off by experiences with therapists who cannot handle the load or do not understand the demands on both firefighter and family.

How can we encourage the Fire Service family to prioritize their mental health and wellness while remaining strong, selfless, and unflinching? We need to make mental health – brain health – safe for our people (remember the job description?).

Let's eliminate damaging affirmations, such as telling another to "suck it up." The culture tells firefighters to be

brave, be tough...but constantly suppressing emotions and stress results in bad outcomes. The fear of criticism and lack of confidentiality is amongst the top reasons why first responders often fear seeking help for their relationship, PTSD, anxiety, depression, and alcohol/substance misuse issues. 1

The adoption of behavioral support programming by departments is a vital and critical component in creating a shift in brain health and wellness for fire departments. It's important to be proactive in treating mental health rather than reactive, which will propel and strengthen the cultural shift by generating a more inclusive and aware workforce. 5 Sadly, the impetus for change in departments around the country is all too often a tragedy instead of risk mitigation and planning.

Another critical goal is to design and implement behavioral care systems into your departments



that should include trusted peer support, benefits understanding and first responder-only treatment options, a behavioral care helpline, normalized health and wellness programming, culturally competent employee assistance programs, clinicians, and critical incident stress management workshops
 – Remember the job description
 - provide a clear path, reduce all injuries (brain included) and reduce liability, self- assess, improve, and continue by creating the resilient firefighter.

Dr. Stephen Odom, PhD is a 30-year first responder and healthcare behavioral health expert. He will be speaking more in depth about this important topic at the Washington State Fire Chiefs Virtual Webinar July 22 at 10:00 AM. Dr. Odom is the founder and Chief Officer of First Responder Wellness,

an inpatient treatment center exclusively treating firefighters and other public safety professionals for alcohol, post traumatic stress, addiction, anxiety, and depression. For more information about Dr. Odom and the work he does, visit www.firstresponder-wellness.com and www.shiftwellness.com

References:

1. University of Phoenix, 2017
2. U.S. Bureau of Labor *Statistics, 2019*
3. *National Fire Protection Association, 2020*
4. *National Fire Protection Association, 2018*
5. *Brataas, 2021, Managing the Human Element of Disasters*

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By Michelle S. Mazzola,
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Recruitment & Retention funding period is 1-4 years. There is no longer a requirement to retain newly hired career firefighters beyond the 3-year grant period. Also, grant match requirements have been waived the past two years.

Fire Protection & Safety (FP&S) Grants

- Community Risk Reduction
- Wildfire Risk Reduction

Next Grant Opportunity: The application period for the next round of AFG grant funding is scheduled to open in October 2021. SAFER & FP&S grants are also scheduled to open in the Fall. Fees for grant writers may be included in many of these grant applications

A list of AFG high priority funding items can be found at :<https://www.resourcesolutionsnow.com/our-services/fema-firefighter-grant-program>

FEMA grants are highly competitive. During this last round of applications submitted in early Spring, FEMA received significantly more grant requests than they can fund.

AFG: 8,136 applications received totaling more than \$2 billion. FEMA has \$319.5 million available and anticipates making 2000 awards.

SAFER: 1,354 applications received (977 hiring; 377 recruitment & retention) totaling more than \$2 billion. FEMA has \$355 million available and anticipates making 300 awards.

FP&S: 600 applications received totaling \$145 million. FEMA has \$35,000,000 available and anticipates making 150 awards.



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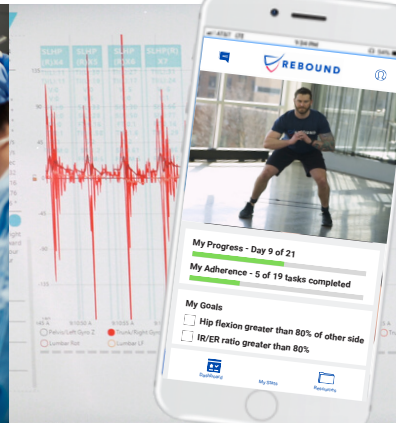
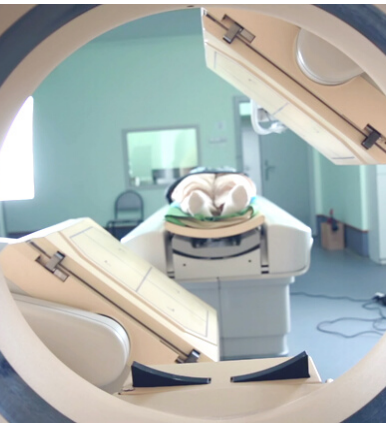
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