



2015 Legislative Targets

AGENCY: WASHINGTON FIRE CHIEFS

Legislative Priority: Raise the E.M.S. levy cap to \$.75 /\$1000 of A.V.

Description:

RCW 84.52.069 authorizes an EMS levy up to \$.50 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation to provide local emergency medical services. The initial authorization of an EMS Levy must include the desired amount of the levy, and the statement of the levy period (6 years, 10 years, or permanent in nature). Passage requires a 60% favorable vote, with a 40% validation of voter turnout. EMS levies are subject to the same 1% limitation annually as are all other property taxes.

The cap for EMS levies, which provides funds to local jurisdictions relative to the provision of emergency life safety efforts, has been capped at 50 cents for over 13 years, and has only been raised once since its inception in 1979. With budgets being extremely tight relative to public safety these days, it only makes sense to allow the local citizenry another option regarding maintaining or enhancing emergency medical services.

The WFC would like to raise the cap for EMS levies from \$.50 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation to \$.75. Any increase would still be subject to voter approval, but the increase would allow another tool for local governments with respect to public safety funding.

Legislative Priority: Funding of all-risk mobilization

Description:

Under RCW 43.43.961, the Fire Service Resource Mobilization Plan is implemented to provide personnel, equipment, and other logistical resources from around the state when a wildland fire or other emergency exceeds the firefighting capacity of local jurisdictions. The types of emergencies that may require state mobilization include wildland fires, earthquakes, floods, spread of contagious disease, and other disasters that local districts are unable to fully handle on their own.

An Assistant Attorney General Interpretation was prepared that reinterpreted the governing RCW regarding state fire service mobilization. This opinion stated that the governing RCW should be interpreted to limit state mobilization to only incidents directly involving fire. This interpretation defeats the purpose of state fire service mobilization and eliminates coordinated response of the various local fire districts to such disasters as floods, earthquakes, rescues, and pandemics. This was demonstrated during the recent Oso Landslide disaster.

The WFC would like to remedy this dangerously narrow interpretation by codifying existing practice with respect to state mobilization, and does so without expanding the use of mobilization for purposes other than those already identified in both state and federal disaster response policies, including “other disasters of unprecedented size,” as outlined in RCW 43.43.961.

Legislative Priority: Public record request compliance funding

Description:

Over the past several years, all levels of government, especially on the local level, have seen increasing numbers of public records requests from individuals in their communities. Fire districts are not immune from this, and many fire districts have become so inundated with requests that the day-to-day work of running the department has suffered. The staff time to comply with these repeated requests does not account for actual time searching and wear and tear on equipment which means that taxpayers are subsidizing these and the work they are paying for is not getting done.

While many of these requests are perfectly reasonable requests for further information or clarification on a particular issue, an increasing number of requests are being made for reasons other than legitimate sharing of information with the public. What many districts are seeing is a tendency for just a few individuals, or often-times just one, making continuous requests that are vague and overbroad, and if the district fails to properly respond to even one of these multiple requests it ends up costing the district and the requester benefits financially.

The Washington Fire Chiefs and fire districts throughout the state honor and respect the rights of individuals to have transparent, open governments doing the people’s work, a major disservice to the public is being done when one individual is able to co-opt such a significant portion of time from a public agency that the mission and purpose of that agency cannot be met. The WFC would like to have a greater balance to this system, which would include funding so that Departments & Districts throughout the state would have the means to comply.

Legislative Priority: Volunteer firefighter incentives

Description:

Volunteer fire fighter numbers are decreasing locally, statewide and across the nation. This is a problem that will have a profound effect going into the future and we need your help.

The WFC is working to specifically identify ways to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters in Washington State. This is a vital item on our Legislative Agenda, and we are looking at practical ways to provide desirable incentives to the fire service volunteers of Washington State.

Legislative Priority: Allowing a city to form RFA and RFA “clean-up” language

Description:

Fire Protection Districts and city fire departments have dissimilar funding mechanisms, and staffing levels often vary significantly between these adjacent jurisdictions. These differences create barriers to consolidation of services and the creation of multi-department RFAs. If cities are allowed to form RFAs, future mergers with adjacent fire district or RFA entities will be more feasible since RFAs and Fire Protection Districts are very similar in structure. Cities choosing to create an RFA to isolate funding for fire and EMS services should be able to do so, ensuring these critical services do not compete with other non-essential services.

In another bill we have identified several areas in the law that treat an RFA differently than what the law currently provides for all fire protection districts. The intent of the existing RFA legislation was to provide the same mechanisms for an RFA as the law provides for fire protection districts. Over the last few years we have identified several areas where an RFA does not enjoy the same mechanisms as provided for fire protection districts. This bill will correct those areas we have identified where differences exist in the RFA law.

Other items of interest:

- **Funding to support FTA and regional training**
- **Eliminating barriers for residential fire sprinklers installation**
- **10 year smoke alarms**
- **Non-toxic fire retardants in plastics**
- **GEMT enabling legislation**
- **Fire vehicle weight limit changes**
- **Biennial budgets for fire districts allowed**