



Wyoming Retirement System

Partnering to Build Financial Security for Members and their Families

Mark Gordon
Governor

Ruth Ryerson
Executive Director

Highlights for House Bill 246 – Volunteer Search & Rescue

Affected Parties: Members of the WRS Volunteer Firefighter & EMT Pension Plan, and Members of Search & Rescue Departments throughout the State

Position: The Volunteer Firefighter & EMT Board supports this bill, as does the County Sheriffs Association

Currently, the members of this plan are individuals throughout the state who serve in a volunteer capacity as firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians. There are specific participation requirements for volunteers to be enrolled in this pension plan. This plan was established in 1967 for volunteer firefighters and in 2015 the volunteer EMTs were added. Funding for benefits comes primarily from a tax on fire insurance premiums; the Plan receives up to 70 percent of the fire insurance premium tax annually. A secondary source of funding is the required member contributions of \$15 each month.

This bill would allow the addition of volunteers associated with county search and rescue organizations to be included the plan. The bill would also increase the amount of the tax revenue from fire insurance premium taxes going to the plan; this tax revenue in total has been about \$4.4 million annually for the last several years. The funding for the Volunteer Plan from the tax on fire insurance premiums has been about \$3.2 million in previous years, and with this legislation would increase to a maximum of 90 percent, which is estimated to be about \$4 million annually. WRS' actuary evaluated this level of funding and the additional members, and advised it would be sufficient to support a favorable funding status for the plan over the long term.

The Plan has 2,364 active members plus 1,235 retirees and 255 survivors receiving pensions. There are 118 participating departments throughout the State, with the largest being Fremont County with 139 active members. The 41 smallest departments have membership in the single digits, but are also critical in providing important public safety services to their communities. All of these communities save a great deal of money by not having to staff and pay a full time fire or EMT Department.

The Volunteer Firefighter & EMT Board, and the County Sheriffs Association believe it is a good fit to have these volunteers as members of the pension plan. The search and rescue volunteers are critical to Wyoming, and providing a long-term incentive for these volunteers is an effective way to strengthen the emergency services needed across the state.