

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

C.S.H.B. 2158  
By: Ashby  
Higher Education  
Committee Report (Substituted)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

There is a nationwide shortage of volunteer firefighters, and fire departments and local communities in Texas have reported having a difficult time in attracting volunteer firefighters. Given this, the state needs to step in and provide volunteer firefighters with an additional incentive to join volunteer fire departments. C.S.H.B. 2158 seeks to do so by making the tuition and laboratory fees exemption for certain volunteer firefighters enrolled in courses offered as part of a fire science curriculum at public universities more widely available.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

### **ANALYSIS**

C.S.H.B. 2158 amends the Education Code to revise the eligibility requirements for the tuition and laboratory fees exemption for a firefighter enrolled in a fire science course at a public institution of higher education who is not employed as a firefighter by a political subdivision, as follows:

- removes the requirement that the firefighter is currently, and has been for at least one year, an active member of an organized volunteer fire department participating in the Texas Emergency Services Retirement System or a retirement system established under the Texas Local Fire Fighters Retirement Act;
- requires that the firefighter instead be a member in good standing of a volunteer fire department that is registered with the Texas A&M Forest Service and responds to 9-1-1 emergency calls in a designated area; and
- additionally requires such a firefighter to do the following:
  - attend at least 20 hours of annual training approved by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas; and
  - attend or provide support services for at least 25 percent of the department's emergencies in a calendar year.

The bill applies beginning with tuition and laboratory fees charged for the 2023 fall semester.

### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2023.

## **COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE**

While C.S.H.B. 2158 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

Whereas the introduced required the annual training attended by a volunteer firefighter for purposes of eligibility for the tuition and fees exemption to be provided by the Texas State Association of Fire Fighters, the Texas Fire Marshals' Association, or the Texas Commission on Fire Protection, the substitute requires the annual training instead to be approved by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas.