

**BILL ANALYSIS**

S.B. 868  
By: Sparks  
Appropriations  
Committee Report (Unamended)

**BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

In 2001, the 77th Texas Legislature enacted legislation creating the rural volunteer fire department (VFD) assistance program. Currently, the program is administered by the Texas A&M Forest Service and provides grants to rural VFDs for firefighting vehicles, fire and rescue equipment, protective clothing, and firefighter training. The program is funded by an annual assessment of certain property and casualty insurers authorized to do business in Texas. In the aftermath of the 2024 Panhandle wildfires, the Texas House of Representatives Investigative Committee on the Panhandle Wildfires was formed to conduct all inquiries into the wildfires, including investigating factors that contributed to the wildfires. In the committee's 2024 report to the House of Representatives, the committee recommended various reforms to increase funding to VFDs. S.B. 868 seeks to satisfy this recommendation by allocating at least 10 percent of appropriations for the program in a state fiscal year to VFDs in areas of Texas classified as being at high risk for large wildfires.

**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**

S.B. 868 amends the Government Code to allocate at least 10 percent of appropriations for a state fiscal year from the volunteer fire department assistance fund for the purpose of providing assistance to volunteer fire departments under the rural volunteer fire department assistance program to departments in areas of Texas classified as being at high risk for large wildfires by the Texas A&M Forest Service. If the amount of assistance requested by these departments in a state fiscal year is less than the amount allocated for that purpose, the remaining amount may be used for other types of requests for assistance.

S.B. 868 applies only to an appropriation made from the volunteer fire department assistance fund on or after the bill's effective date.

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2025.