

HCS HB 72 -- WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS

SPONSOR: Taylor (48)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Local Government by a vote of 15 to 1.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 72.

This bill extends the sunset for the Line of Duty Compensation Act, a publicly funded death benefit program for certain first responders. This bill would sunset the program on June 30, 2037.

The bill also modifies provisions related to volunteer firefighter workers' compensation.

For the purposes of computing the average weekly wage that serves as the basis for determining the compensation rate for a volunteer firefighter or a volunteer emergency services responder, the benefit will be based on the average weekly wage in the volunteer's regular employment, only to the extent that the injury prevents the volunteer from performing the job duties of regular employment. The bill also specifies a method for calculating compensation when the average weekly wage has not been fixed or cannot be ascertained.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the purpose of the bill is to base workers' compensation for volunteer firefighters on a livable wage, not a volunteer wage. Because of the volunteer status of these firefighters, the calculation of the benefit results in extremely low compensation rates. The bill bases the rate instead on the wage of the firefighter's day job, a job he or she would be unable to perform if injured during a call to put out a fire. This is the least society can do to compensate for the sacrifices made by these public servants.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Taylor; Kyle Marquart.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill cautioned against basing the rate on the lost wages of the individual volunteer. This would give different firefighters different compensation benefits and

would likely increase insurance rates dramatically for political subdivisions. A higher standardized rate would be more fair for the firefighters and manageable for the budgets of the political subdivisions. The simplest solution is to use the comparable firefighter or other first responder wage for that county or area.

Testifying in person on the bill was Patrick Bonnot, MIRMA.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.