

HCS HB 3332 -- EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

SPONSOR: Matthiesen

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Crime and Public Safety by a vote of 15 to 1, and 1 voting present.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 3332.

This bill adds air ambulance pilot and air ambulance paramedic or nurse to the list of "public safety personnel" for the "Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Act".

Currently, the application for tuition award is due December 15th and the notice of eligibility is sent by March 1st. This bill moves those dates to February 1st and May 1st respectively.

Currently, if the Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Fund is insufficient to fully fund tuition awards for all eligible applicants, tuition awards are prioritized by the county or city not within a county with the highest crime rate per capita, followed by the years of service, and other specific criteria if there is a tie for eligibility.

This bill removes the criteria regarding a tie for eligibility and replaces the requirement regarding the crime rate per capita for priority class one, public safety personnel, and priority class two, dependents of public safety personnel. Priority for each class will be given to "renewal students", as defined by the Department.

Currently, the Line of Duty Compensation Act provides compensation to the survivors of certain public safety officers and emergency responders killed in the line of duty and is subject to the Missouri Sunset Act, ending on December 31, 2031.

This bill repeals the sunset and specifies that the Act shall not be subject to the Missouri Sunset Act.

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

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that, last year, the legislature passed the public safety recruitment and retention act and it is a great tool to help first responders. The air ambulance responders are always left out and the goal is to ensure everyone is taken care of. So many positions are left unfilled and this will go a long way to help recruitment. Air ambulance pilots and their crews are first responders. Sometimes they are the only thing separating people from life or death. These people face major risks and it is one of the most hazardous sectors of emergency response. They face the same risks and treat the same patients, so they should be recognized and should have access to these scholarships. This also expands the degrees the first responders can obtain through this tuition reimbursement program.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Matthiesen; Missouri Nurses Association; Tommie Dugger; Savannah Dugger; Trevor Wolfe; Jeffrey Dugger; Missouri Chamber of Commerce; Air Methods; and Arnie C. Dienoff.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that this updates the statutory deadline to be in line with other financial aid they provide. It also updates a certification that does not actually exist. The scholarship ranking mechanism in the statute involves ranking of crime statistics and there is some information in the bill that does not exist or cannot be provided.

Testifying in person on the bill was Leah Strid, Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development.

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.