

Fiscal Estimate Narratives

WTCS 4/18/2023

LRB Number	23-2157/1	Introduction Number	SB-0118	Estimate Type	Original
Description technical college fire fighter courses					

Assumptions Used in Arriving at Fiscal Estimate

SB 118 requires the Wisconsin Technical College System Board (WTCS) and technical college district boards to provide different course modules within the training programs in fire prevention and protection to account for different firefighter focuses and to differentiate firefighter training programs based on whether the training is for volunteer firefighting officers or paid, full-time firefighting officers.

The bill does not define the "different firefighter focuses" for which course modules must be developed and therefore it is unclear whether the 21 certifications and continuing education courses currently offered including, but not limited to, Entry Level Fire Fighter, Firefighter I, Firefighter II, Fire Inspector I, Aircraft Rescue Firefighter, Driver/Operator Pumper, Hazardous Materials Technician, Fire Officer I and Fire Officer II, satisfy the bill's requirements. If additional course modules must be developed and offered, there would be a significant fiscal impact on WTCS Districts (i.e., colleges). The fiscal impact is indeterminate given it is unknown how many additional course modules must be developed.

In order to differentiate programs directed towards firefighter officers based on whether the training is for volunteer firefighting officers or paid, full-time firefighting officers, WTCS colleges would need to duplicate their current firefighting officer course offerings. Based on the reported expenditures for fire services and the number of students enrolled in Fire Officer courses in FY22, the addition of another Fire Officer course designed for volunteer firefighting officers is estimated to increase WTCS colleges' costs by approximately \$580,000 annually.

WTCS colleges are prohibited from charging a fee for firefighter training programs for members of municipal fire departments and receive \$600,000 annually in fire department dues program revenue under s. 20.292(1)(gr) for this purpose. The costs of providing firefighter training programs are significant, due in part to the specialized capital equipment needs, and far exceed the program revenue provided to colleges. Over \$2.8 million of WTCS colleges' costs were reimbursable under the fire department dues program in FY22 and only \$600,000 in fire dues program revenue was available. At the current rate, WTCS colleges receive approximately \$0.21 in program revenue for every \$1.00 in reimbursable firefighter training program costs. If colleges must offer an additional Fire Officer course for volunteers, costs for WTCS colleges will increase and there will be a significant fiscal impact given the stagnant program revenue and inability to raise tuition revenue for these courses. To fully support the current program and offer a new, parallel Fire Officer course designed for volunteers, the program revenue allocation should be increased by approximately \$2.8 million annually.

Importantly, the current fire service course options offered by WTCS colleges are designed to prepare students for National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) certification, should they choose to seek certification. While certification is not required at the state level, many local fire departments do require certification as part of their hiring standards. Alternative course modules and differentiated firefighter officers programs that remove components of the curriculum aligned with NFPA standards do not prepare students for certification exams and may not meet local fire departments' needs.

Additionally, the WTCS Board will incur costs associated with the development of new training materials. A course development committee would be convened to develop the new module and approximately 125-200 hours of WTCS staff and committee member time would be needed to develop the new materials. Costs to the WTCS Board can be absorbed within the agency budget.

Long-Range Fiscal Implications

The addition of another Fire Officer course designed for volunteer firefighting officers is estimated to increase WTCS colleges' costs by approximately \$580,000 annually and further erode the colleges' reimbursement rate under the fire department dues program, which is currently approximately 21%. Having parallel courses will reduce fire service certification passage rates and increase WTCS course delivery costs. In addition, it may exacerbate frustration among fire fighters and departments over course cancellation or non-offering of courses due to low enrollments.