



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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June 6, 2023

Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #699

### **Youth Volunteer Firefighter Training Grant Program (Safety and Professional Services -- Safety and Buildings Programs)**

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 569, #9]

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#### **CURRENT LAW**

2021 Act 58, the 2021-23 biennial budget act, created the Youth Volunteer Firefighter Training Grant Program under the Department of Safety and Professional Services, funded with one-time \$50,000 PR each year. The program issues grants for youth firefighter training pilot programs in volunteer fire departments, technical colleges, and high schools with the intent to increase recruitment and improve retention of volunteer firefighters. Eligible fire departments, technical colleges, and high schools were required to be in good standing based on DSPS evaluation of compliance. The program is funded by the agency's safety and buildings general operations appropriation, which collects revenue from fees paid by individuals seeking licensure in industry and trades professions, as well as plan review for plumbing and buildings.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

1. In the 2021-23 biennium, DSPS awarded six grants, totaling the full \$100,000 over the biennium. Recipient organizations included: Oconto Fire Rescue Department, Western Technical College, Winneconne High School, Edgerton Fire Protection District, Howard-Suamico School District, and Nicolet College.

2. Assembly Bill 43/Senate Bill 70 would provide \$100,000 PR each year in ongoing funding to make the Youth Volunteer Firefighter Training Grant Program permanent. DSPS reports having received 15 applications requesting \$185,000 in grant funds over the biennium, and the Department included in its September, 2022, agency budget request the provision to seek ongoing grant funds of \$200,000 over the 2023-25 biennium.

3. Using data from the National Fire Department Registry, the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association indicates that Wisconsin had 762 registered fire departments in calendar year 2022. Of those, approximately 78.8% were exclusively volunteer-based, and another 13.7% were mostly volunteer-based. About 5.9% of departments were exclusively career firefighters, and 1.6% were mostly career firefighters.

4. Information from the National Volunteer Fire Council and National Fire Protection Association further indicates the number of volunteer firefighters, while varying by year, has declined to 676,900 as of 2020, from levels exceeding 800,000 nationally as recently as 2015. Information specific to Wisconsin is not immediately available.

5. Considering that a large portion of Wisconsin fire departments are mostly volunteer-based, and considering the demonstrated interest in the grant program, the Committee could provide ongoing funding of \$100,000 PR each year [Alternative 1]. Given that DSPS reported grant demand at \$185,000 over the 2021-23 biennium, the Committee could also consider providing \$92,500 each year to match grant funding to recent demand [Alternative 2]. Considering that the program was originally provided \$50,000 PR each year under 2021 Act 58, the Committee could approve the same amount in the upcoming biennium on an ongoing basis [Alternative 3], or specify any amount of funding is on a one-time basis [Alternative 4]. The Committee could also take no action, and the grant program would end on June 30, 2023 [Alternative 5].

## ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$100,000 PR each year in ongoing funding to continue the Youth Volunteer Firefighter Training Grant Program.

ALT 1	Change to Base
PR	\$200,000

2. Provide \$92,500 PR each year in ongoing funding to continue the Youth Volunteer Firefighter Training Grant Program. (This would equal total grant requests in the 2021-23 biennium.)

ALT 2	Change to Base
PR	\$185,000

3. Provide \$50,000 PR each year in ongoing funding. (This matches the amount provided under 2021 Act 58, which created the program.)

ALT 3	Change to Base
PR	\$100,000

4. Specify that the funding is one-time. (This alternative could be moved in addition to Alternative 1, 2, or 3.)
5. Take no action.

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