



Senate Bill 577

State Fire Training Accessibility Act

Introduced, February 15, 2023

SUMMARY

SB 577 allows the State Fire Marshal to accept additional funding sources for the California Fire Service Training and Education Program. The bill would make the same change relative to the California Fire and Arson Training Act. Permitting the State Fire Marshall to receive additional funding sources for training programs will help to mitigate rising fees for those seeking fire training certification.

PROBLEM

California State Fire Training (SFT) provides curriculum and certification to current fire department, firefighters, and individuals seeking a career in the fire service. These courses meet or exceed National Fire Protection Association and National Wildfire Coordination Group standards. This training is provided to over 23,000 paid and volunteer firefighters every year.

When SFT was established, it only allowed for user fees to recover the cost of staff, course development and certification. Over the years the fire service has become more professional and certifications are now required for every position in the fire service. To generate enough revenue, fees needed to be raised by over 200% and in some cases 400%. This has resulted in courses and certification becoming unaffordable to volunteer firefighters and individuals seeking entry level positions.

BACKGROUND

The California Fire Service Training and Education) Division under the CAL FIRE – Office of the State Fire Marshal provides an essential need for a diverse California fire service. It is responsible for rules and regulations, course development, oversight of course delivery, certification, instructor registration, evaluator registration, and certification testing. This division is vital to the fire service because it provides the course curriculum for over 160 different courses and 26 certification levels, including some nationally accredited certifications.

In the era of climate change, the fire service is regularly responding to mass conflagration wildfires and the need for well-trained fire personnel has never been greater. Central to achieving this goal is making SFT courses both accessible and affordable to all fire personnel, especially the next generation of firefighters. Historically, SFT has been able to provide these services at a minimal cost to its users. However, doing so in an increasingly complex and expanding arena of fire protection has resulted in funding shortfalls, requiring a significant increase in their fees.

Solution

SB 577 allows the State Fire Marshal to accept additional funding sources for the California Fire Service Training and Education Program. The bill would make the same change relative to the California Fire and Arson Training Act. Given the enormous risk of fire and other disasters that face California, we must make SFT an affordable solution for our paid and volunteer firefighters,

as well as students wishing to enter the fire service. Permitting the State Fire Marshall to receive additional funding sources for training programs will help to mitigate rising fees for those seeking fire training certification. The financial obstacles the fee increases have created for students and fire departments demands a legislative solution.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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