

- SUBJECT:** Insuring volunteer firefighters or police force members
- COMMITTEE:** Urban Affairs — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 4 ayes — Bailey, Menendez, Latham, Mallory Caraway  
0 nays  
3 absent — Murphy, Cohen, Martinez Fischer
- WITNESSES:** For — Chris Barron, State Firemen’s and Fire Marshals’ Association; Ted Regnier, Volunteer Firemen’s Insurance Services. (*Registered, but did not testify*: A.R. “Babe” Schwartz, Volunteer Fire Fighters Services, Inc.)  
Against — None  
On — Evelyn Njuguna, Texas Municipal League
- BACKGROUND:** Government Code, ch. 614, subch. F establishes the Texas Rural Volunteer Fire Department Insurance Program. The subchapter provides that the Director of the Forest Service may adopt rules necessary to assist rural volunteer fire departments in the payment of workers’ compensation insurance, accidental death, and disability insurance.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 2667 would allow the Director of the Forest Service to adopt rules to assist rural volunteer fire departments in the payment of audit costs associated with workers’ compensation claims in any year in which there was an abnormally high number of wildfires. The program would be administered through the same funding sources as the existing insurance program.  
  
The bill would add Government Code ch. 216, subch. H to require, beginning January 1, 2008, that volunteer police force members be insured against any injury suffered in the course and scope of performing duties assigned by the state agency or political subdivision they serve. The governmental entity requesting or contracting the volunteer would be responsible for providing the insurance.  
  
The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

CSHB 2667 would implement simple measures to ensure that volunteer police and firefighters receive adequate workers' compensation insurance. The bill would provide the necessary authorization for the Texas Rural Volunteer Fire Department (VFD) Insurance Program to pay for audit fees associated with workers' compensation insurance claims. Volunteer departments that maintain workers' compensation insurance currently are required to pay for audits as a part of the total annual cost of this insurance coverage. While these audits usually are relatively inexpensive, they can climb in cost during years with abnormally high numbers of wildfires. Volunteer departments operate on extremely tight budgets, and expenses associated with mandatory audits can have a significant impact under these circumstances. CSHB 2667 would authorize the use of excess funds — \$2.1 million as of May 2007 — from the Rural VFD Insurance Program to subsidize the payment of required audits for use when a department's resources were strained. Expenses for these audits can range from \$200,000 to \$300,000 for all VFD's for years with high incidences of wildfires.

The bill also would require governmental entities to provide insurance to voluntary police officers for injuries suffered while performing duties. The bill would have a minimal fiscal impact on local governmental units because most cities and towns employ few volunteer officers. The value to the individuals who serve local governments, however, would be substantial. Volunteer officers who put themselves in danger to uphold the public interest when necessary should not have to pay for any harm that might befall them in the course of their service.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

HB 2667 originally was recommended for the Local and Consent Calendars Committee, which transferred it the Calendars Committee.