

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 3070
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Water & Rural Affairs
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Under current law, volunteer fire departments (VFDs) can submit grant applications to the Texas A&M Forest Service to help with the purchase of new equipment through Rural VFD Assistance Program. Some stakeholders have noted the need to expand the appropriate uses of these grants, also known as 2604 grants. These grants are important in helping small volunteer departments acquire the proper equipment to assist their communities.

H.B. 3070 would authorize a VFD to submit a request for emergency assistance from the Rural VFD Assistance Program to repair or replace equipment damaged or lost in responding to a governor-declared state of disaster. It would require the Texas A&M Forest Service to include in the criteria and qualifications for the distribution of VFD assistance funds a department's need for emergency assistance. The bill also would require that at least ten percent of the program's funds in a state fiscal year be dedicated to filling such emergency requests. Finally, if the amount of emergency assistance funds requested in a state fiscal year is less than the amount so dedicated, the bill would authorize any remaining funds to be used for other types of requests for assistance.

H.B. 3070 amends current law relating to grants for emergency assistance under the rural volunteer fire department assistance program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority previously granted to the director of the Texas A&M Forest Service is modified in SECTION 1 (Section 614.102, Government Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 614.102, Government Code, by amending Subsections (a) and (c) and adding Subsection (h), as follows:

(a) Requires the Texas A&M Forest Service, rather than the Texas Forest Service, to administer the program established under this subchapter (Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program), and authorizes the director of the Texas A&M Forest Service (director) to adopt rules necessary to assist volunteer fire departments in paying for equipment, including the replacement or repair of equipment, and training of personnel, including by providing emergency assistance under Section 614.103(a-1), rather than for equipment and training for personnel.

(c) Requires the director to:

(1) determine reasonable criteria and qualifications for the distribution of money from the volunteer fire department assistance fund, including:

(A) makes a nonsubstantive change to this paragraph;

(B) makes no changes to this paragraph; and

(C) the department's need for emergency assistance under Section 614.103(a-1); and

(2) makes no changes to this subdivision.

(h) Provides that, except as otherwise provided by this subsection, at least 10 percent of appropriations for a state fiscal year from the fund for the purpose of providing assistance to volunteer fire departments under the program is allocated for providing emergency assistance under Section 614.103(a-1). Authorizes the remaining amount, if the amount of assistance requested under Section 614.103(a-1) in a state fiscal year is less than the amount allocated under this subsection, to be used for other types of requests for assistance.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 614.103, Government Code, by adding Subsection (a-1), as follows:

(a-3) Authorizes a volunteer fire department whose equipment is damaged or lost in responding to a declared state of disaster under Section 418.014 (Declaration of State of Disaster) in an area subject to the declaration to submit a request for emergency assistance from the fund for:

(1) the replacement or repair of damaged or lost personal protective equipment or other firefighting equipment; and

(2) the purchase of a machine to clean personal protective equipment.

SECTION 3. Requires the director, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act, to adopt rules as necessary to implement Subchapter G, Chapter 614, Government Code, as amended by this Act.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2019.