

## **HB 2196 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY**

### **Senate Committee On Workforce**

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**Meeting Dates:** 4/25, 4/30

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#### **WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:**

Designates employees of the Oregon Military Department (OMD) whose primary duty is fighting structural, aircraft, wildland, or other fires eligible for participation as a firefighter in Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Applies to former, current, and future OMD employees.

#### **ISSUES DISCUSSED:**

- Certification and duties of OMD firefighters
- Current systems safeguarding accuracy of PERS classifications
- Federal reimbursement for OMD firefighter total compensation, including employer PERS contributions

#### **EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:**

No amendment.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Under current law, certain public employees whose primary duties are fighting fires qualify as members of the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). In the PERS system, workers legally classified as firefighters accrue pensions at a higher rate and qualify for full retirement five years earlier than general service employees. Workers classified as firefighters include firefighters employed by local governments, fire marshals, and employees of the Oregon Department of Forestry certified by the State Forester as professional wildland firefighters.

The Oregon Military Department (OMD) currently employs 47 people whose primary duty is to fight fires and who work on airbases in Portland and Klamath Falls. Under current law, these employees are not eligible for participation as a firefighter in PERS. The Oregon Military Department (OMD), however, mistakenly believed they were. OMD mis-classified such persons as eligible, made PERS contributions at the firefighter rate, and erroneously communicated to employees they would receive PERS firefighter benefits.

House Bill 2196-A clarifies that employees of the Oregon Military Department whose primary duty is fighting structural, aircraft, wildland, or other fires are indeed eligible for participation as a firefighter in PERS. House Bill 2196-A also grants PERS firefighting status to those employees whose service was mis-classified so long as OMD made the required PERS contributions. And any firefighting employees OMD reported as general service will be converted to firefighters for PERS purposes.