



OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO CLC

House Business and Labor Committee,
Chair Paul Holvey
Vice Chair Daniel Bonham
Vice Chair Dacia Grayber

02/28/21

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, Business and Labor Committee Members,

For the Record my name is Karl Koenig representing over 3500 career fire fighters and paramedics across Oregon.

Today we are speaking in favor of HB 2373, the fire fighter apprenticeship Bill. You have heard from the Bill's chief sponsors including the Labor Commissioner who is ultimately responsible for all registered Oregon apprenticeship opportunities.

We are at a fire staffing crossroad in Oregon's fire service. Unprecedented fire activity that is no longer a wildfire problem. Over 6000 structures lost, 2500 homes in one fire district alone. The on-duty strength in Oregon reflects a day gone by. We need to create a system of recruitment that closer reflects the communities we serve. One piece to achieve that is a registered apprenticeship, where on the job training meets the fire suppression and mitigation needs across the entire state.

When we examine PERS by the Numbers there are over 4300 members in Police and Fire across all three tiers eligible to retire right now. We can approximate 1200 or 30% are fire service employees, which is right at 30% of the entire Oregon career fire service. Even if we were just speaking of attrition that number is astronomical in getting their replacements trained up. We as an industry are behind. The reasons are multifaceted but none the less staring us in the face as we prepare for the 2021 fire season. Daily staffing in Oregon is woefully low, at approximately 900 per day and another 900 seasonal wildland fire fighters protecting 4.3 Million Oregonians and 98,000 square miles. Given our increasing age, population, attrition, increased local call volume and Oregon's use of career and volunteers to be our standing army in the suppression of large fires similar to last years, we need more on duty strength. Apprenticeship alone will not be enough to up-staff Oregon's fire service, but it will diversify essential service wherever it is applied.

Giving women, people of color and returning veterans a realistic look at Oregon's career fire service is not only good business but when we closer represent the communities, we serve we become better stewards of our state.

Oregon is in need of a plan to staff Oregon's Fire Service into the future. HB 2373 the apprenticeship Bill, with it's staffing in addition to a proud history of volunteerism, along with the traditional path to career fire service is an important first step.

It is time to open fire service careers to all of those interested to improve staffing and service to all Oregon when emergencies arise. This program will improve community representation and improve staffing wherever it is applied.

The Oregon State Fire Fighters Council urge a Yes vote in the Business and Labor Committee.

Respectfully,

Karl Koenig
President
Oregon State Fire Fighters Council

265 Commercial Street S.E., Suite 260 • Salem, Oregon 97301 • Phone (503) 540-0648 • Fax (503) 391-5878
www.osffc.org