

Fire Service Delivery Report



Pursuant to Chapter 475, Laws of 2023 (SB 5187)

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES**

December 1, 2023

Report to the Legislature

Director Mike Fong

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Washington State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) plays a vital role in public safety. Nested within the Washington State Patrol, the SFMO provides premiere, live-fire training to volunteer, recruit and career firefighters at the Firefighter Training Academy, assuring that Washington's firefighters are well prepared when responding to emergency life-and-death situations. The SFMO also coordinates and oversees the statewide response when substantial natural disasters overwhelm local resources such as wildfires, global pandemics, hazardous liquid and gas pipeline accidents, energy and stored energy explosions, large-scale earthquakes, flooding and other natural disasters.

The SFMO has a broad responsibility to ensure fire and life safety for people in Washington including:

- Mobilizing the statewide response to significant emergency events that exhaust local resources
- Training basic to advanced firefighters to nationally recognized standards
- Providing hazmat training to all first responders statewide
- Conducting fire and life safety inspections in childcare, health care, and residential care facilities
- Issuing licenses and certifications for industries including fireworks, cigarettes and fire sprinkler systems
- Collecting and appropriately transmitting fire report information such as fire fatalities to the National Fire Incident Reporting System, and
- Investigating fires that are criminal, suspected, or undetermined cause fires

The 2023-25 State Operating Budget ([Chapter 475, Laws of 2023 \(SB 5187, Section 133\(3\)\)](#)) established the Fire Service Delivery Workgroup (Workgroup) and required the following members:

- Executive Director of the Washington Fire Chiefs as chair the workgroup;
- President of the Washington State Council of Firefighters;
- Executive Director of the Washington Fire Commissioners Association; and
- President of the Washington State Fire Fighters' Association.
- The Department of Commerce (Commerce) was required to staff the workgroup, which was directed to evaluate existing funding and service delivery models of fire service functions.

Key findings

When a fire starts, people in Washington trust that fire service professionals will have the resources they need to keep residents safe. However, the Workgroup's evaluation found that the SFMO cannot maintain adequate levels of response and service to Washington's communities without adequate and sustained funding for fire services.

To evaluate fire service funding and delivery, the Workgroup conducted outreach to partner organizations statewide. This effort included convening seven work sessions, multiple meetings with numerous agencies, and one statewide stakeholder meeting that included the SFMO. Through this collaboration, the workgroup identified six significant challenges to fire service funding and delivery:

- The SFMO and its fire services have been underfunded. Approximately 97% of its policy level budget requests¹ over the last 10 years failed to receive funding. This dynamic jeopardizes the sustainability of fire services and the integrity of the existing fire service delivery model.
- Local fire departments pay 35% to 55% more than the SFMO for equivalent positions² resulting in multiple, long-term staff vacancies in the SFMO.
- Rural and economically vulnerable firefighters experience disproportionate barriers to accessing firefighting training, increasing risk of disproportionate negative impacts to the communities, firefighters and the natural environment in those areas.
- The [All-Risk Mobilization Program](#) does not have adequate staffing for the mobilization mission for statewide emergency response.
- The SFMO does not provide four statutory mandates because they are not funded:
 - fire investigation services,
 - hazmat preparedness,
 - inspections, and
 - smoke detector enforcement.
- The SFMO's outdated technology results in unnecessary time and labor-intensive processes and procedures, which compounds with the current staff vacancy rate. The SFMO received \$408,000 to complete a technology modernization feasibility study in 2024, which would inform budget requests for the identified improvements.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow aim to stabilize SFMO's activities in both the short-term, through adequate funding for the staff, training and all statutory functions, and in the long-term through an intentional agency structure. The Workgroup believes that the SFMO must be well-positioned to compete for scarce resources as an independent peer agency, not within a state agency that has a separate critical mission.

- A) Creating a roadmap workgroup to study and define the necessary steps for an independent SFMO agency.
- B) Creating a new legislative liaison position solely dedicated to representing fire service stakeholders and the SFMO.
- C) Establishing the Fire Service Advisory Committee to work with the legislative liaison, the SFMO, Washington State Patrol, the Office of Financial Management and the Governor's Office. The committee will evaluate, educate and advocate for fire service funding and policy needs, and work towards establishing an independent agency for the SFMO.
- D) Sustaining SFMO recruitment and retention by enabling wage parity for employee salaries to be competitive with local fire jurisdictions' salaries,³
- E) Revise civilian staff hiring policies at the WSP that narrow the pool of eligible candidates for noncommissioned SFMO positions.
- F) Allocating adequate funding, including additional staff capacity, to six state firefighting training programs.
- G) Allocating adequate funding to the All-Risk Mobilization Program for six additional personnel that will enhance the state's ability to respond to emergencies.

¹ A policy level budget requests represent funding requests outside of mandatory caseload and are for expenditures that change discretionary workload, the nature and scope of services, or alternative strategies and outcomes

² Washington State Office of Financial Management, "2022 Washington State Employees Compensation Survey Report," Sept. 27, 2023, https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/shr/CompensationAndJobClasses/Salary%20Surveys/2022WSECS/2022_WSECS_State_Report_04-2022.pdf

³ RCW [43.43.380](#) for Washington State Patrol's Troopers and Sergeants' salaries establishes model salary policy.

- H) Providing adequate funding for the SFMO's four unfunded mandates including fire investigations.
- I) Consider the SFMO's technology modernization study's recommendations for improvement.

[Table 1](#) provides a summary of the Workgroup's findings, recommendations and anticipated outcomes to improve the future of fire service funding and delivery. [Appendix D](#) includes the SFMO's budget estimates for recommendations D, F, G and H. If adopted, the workgroup believes the SFMO will have the resources they need to address all hazards that threaten Washington's people and environment.

Figure 1: Fire Service Delivery Workgroup Recommendations

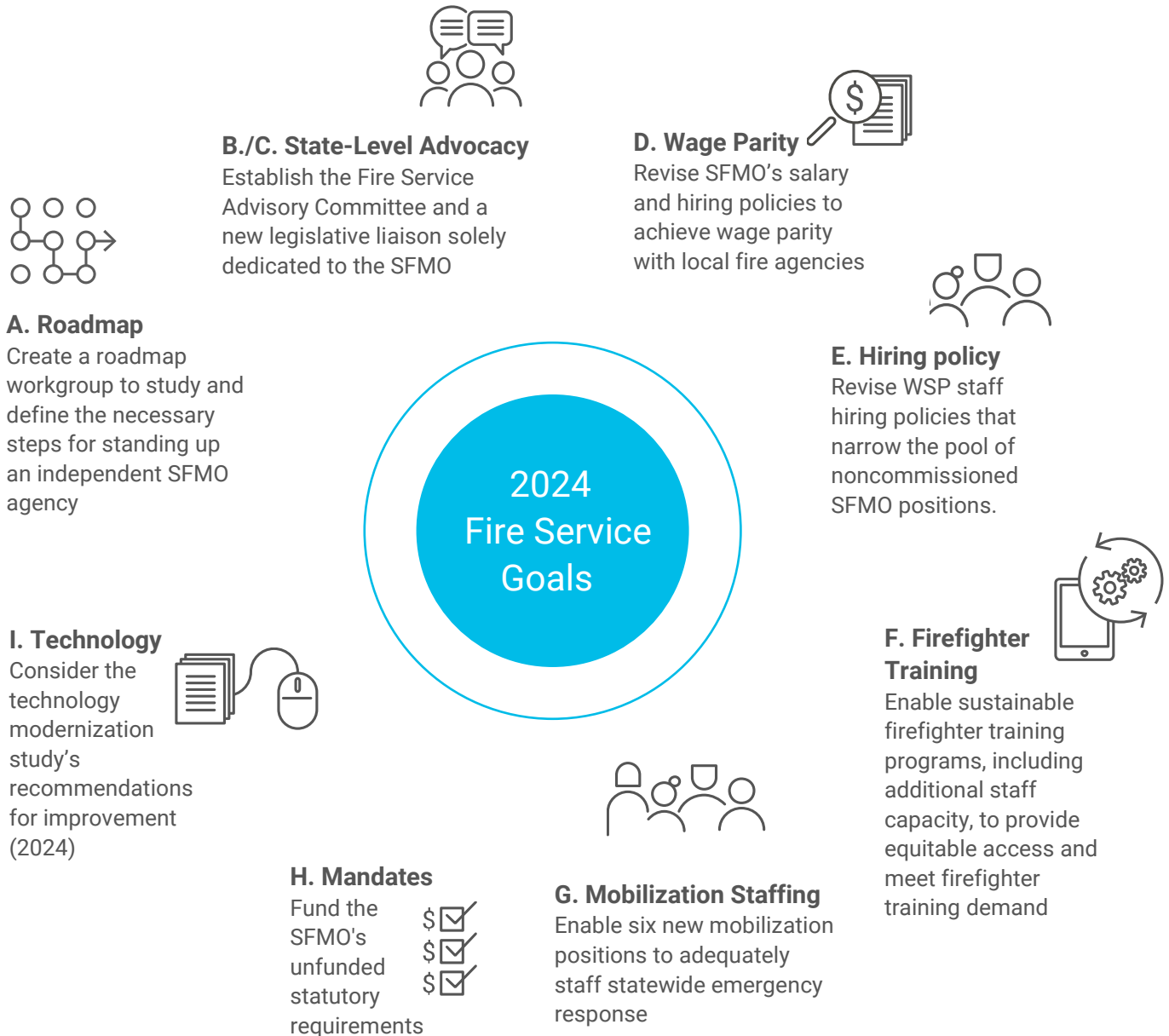


Table 1: Fire service funding and delivery findings, recommendations and outcomes

Findings	Recommendations	Anticipated outcomes
<p>A. While responsible for protecting life and property from fire and hazardous materials, the structure of the State Fire Marshal’s Office does not allow the direct decision-making necessary to prioritize fire services. Over the last 10 years, only 3.4% of the SFMO’s policy level budget requests were funded, while the Fire Service Training Account’s year-end balance declined \$6.2 million over the last 12 years due to insufficient funding⁴.</p>	<p>A. Washington should work toward establishing an independent agency for the State Fire Marshal’s Office (SFMO) to provide the autonomy and flexibility required to meet their responsibilities, and the expectations Washington residents have for fire service. This may be achieved by creating a roadmap workgroup to study and define the steps necessary for standing up an independent SFMO agency.</p>	<p>A. Bolster the future of people’s life and safety services by creating a roadmap to stand up an independent agency for the SFMO.</p>
<p>B. The State Fire Marshal’s Office does not have a legislative liaison responsible for developing, advancing and advocating for fire service legislative priorities.</p>	<p>B. Establish and allocate necessary funding from the operating budget for a legislative liaison dedicated solely to representing the needs of fire services.</p>	<p>B. Increase legislative attention and support for state fire service budget requests and policy changes.</p>
<p>C. Fire service providers’ ability to meet and discuss fire service needs is critical to evaluating, educating and advocating for fire service funding and policy changes.</p>	<p>C. Establish the Fire Service Advisory Committee to evaluate, educate and advocate for fire service needs.</p> <p>Monitor if fire service funding and policy needs are addressed by identifying timelines in which to accomplish key funding and policy deliverables.</p>	<p>C. Provide the opportunity for statewide fire service stakeholders to meet, discuss and advise a SFMO’s legislative liaison, the State Fire Marshal’s Office and Washington State Patrol about fire service funding and policy needs.</p> <p>Continuously work toward establishing an independent agency for the State Fire Marshal’s Office.</p>
<p>D. Local fire departments pay 35% to 55% more than the SFMO for equivalent positions⁵ and require less invasive background checks. Consequently, the SFMO struggles to recruit and retain employees. SFMO reports 83% of part-time Fire Training positions, 20% of full-time Fire Training positions, and 17% of full-time Prevention positions are vacant as of October 2023.</p>	<p>D. Increase the SFMO employee salaries to be competitive with local fire jurisdictions’ salaries for equivalent positions. Model salary policy was recently established in RCW 43.43.380 for Washington State Patrol’s troopers and sergeants. The recommendation is to establish a similar statute for those within the SFMO.</p> <p>Appendix D, Table 9 provides the SFMO’s cost estimate for all Deputy State Fire Marshals’ wage parity.</p>	<p>D. Address pay competitiveness, reduce staff vacancies, and achieve salary parity with local fire jurisdictions.</p>
<p>E. The SFMO is housed under the WSP. Consequently, noncommissioned SFMO employees, including trainers, training support, and maintenance supervisors, go through more stringent background checks than local fire jurisdictions’ employees. This significantly hinders the SFMO’s ability to recruit and retain noncommissioned staff. With reduced staff, the SFMO must offer a reduced number of firefighter trainings.</p>	<p>E. Identify and enact appropriate policy to align background checks for noncommissioned SFMO employees with the background checks used by local fire jurisdictions.</p>	<p>E. Increase the SFMO ability to fully staff their programs by removing overly stringent barriers for noncommissioned SFMO positions.</p>

⁴ Washington State Patrol’s Budget Management Office’s data is included in [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#) of this report.

⁵ Washington State Office of Financial Management, “2022 Washington State Employees Compensation Survey Report,” Sept. 27, 2023, https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/shr/CompensationAndJobClasses/Salary%20Surveys/2022WSECS/2022_WSECS_State_Report_04-2022.pdf

Findings	Recommendations	Anticipated outcomes
<p>From January to September 2023, WSP reports they lost 1,900+ applicants for civilian positions solely for using marijuana within the past 12 months. More people may not apply because they see the marijuana standard and self-screen out.</p>		
<p>F. Inadequate funding for firefighter training creates unequal access to training opportunities, risking disproportionate negative impacts in rural and economically vulnerable areas that experience disproportionate barriers to accessing firefighter training.⁶ The Washington State Fire Fighter Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee currently has 19 fire departments representing an estimated 450 new apprentices per year that are on a waiting list because they are unable to participate in the state program due to lack of funding. Appendix C illustrates a recent and related request.</p>	<p>F. Enable sustainable firefighter training programs, including additional staff capacity, for all state firefighting training programs. This includes: Firefighter 1 and 2 Training, Hazardous Materials Training, Regional Direct Delivery Training, the Firefighter Apprenticeship Program, Firefighter Professional Development Certifications, and Firefighter Training Reimbursement.</p> <p>Appendix D, Table 10 provides the SFMO's cost estimate to fully fund all SFMO training programs.</p>	<p>F. Create equitable access to firefighter training opportunities and reduce risk of disproportionate negative impacts to rural and economically vulnerable communities.</p>
<p>G. One FTE is dedicated to mobilization (MOBE). One part-time position manages training. Due to critically understaffing the All-Risk Mobilization Program, people's safety and the natural environment's health is in jeopardy during significant, year-round emergency events such as hazardous gas pipeline accidents, substantial wildfires or large-scale earthquakes.⁷</p>	<p>G. Allocate funding to the All-Risk Mobilization Program for six additional personnel: one Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal, three Deputy State Fire Marshals, one Information Technology Applications Development – Journey Level, and one Fiscal Technician 3.</p> <p>Appendix D, Table 12 provides the SFMO's cost estimate for six mobilization personnel.</p>	<p>G. Ensure that the state is adequately prepared to respond to a disaster of unprecedented size and destruction, or a significant emergency event such as a pandemic, wildfire, earthquake or tsunami.</p>
<p>H. The SFMO does not provide four statutory mandates because they are not funded, including fire investigations. The unfunded responsibilities compromise preventative efforts to reduce fire occurrences and fire impacts, ultimately compromising community and environmental safety.</p>	<p>H. Fund the SFMO's unfunded statutory requirements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fire investigation services (RCW 43.44.050) - hazmat accidents (RCW 43.44.130) - enforcing smoke detectors (RCW 43.44.110) - inspecting and enforcing building code requirements (RCW 19.27.730) <p>Appendix D, Table 11 provides the SFMO's cost estimate to provide investigations.</p>	<p>H. Investigate fires, identify hazards, pinpoint dangerous practices and prevent future fires by providing regular investigations, inspections and enforcement.</p>
<p>I. The SFMO's technology modernization feasibility study is currently underway. The SFMO's current processes are out-of-date, not within best practices, are heavily reliant on paper, require in-person instruction, and do not maximize resources.</p>	<p>I. When completed, consider opportunities to implement and support the technology modernization feasibility study's recommendations.</p>	<p>I. Improve efficiency, reduce costs, expand training, and strengthen cybersecurity and data protection.</p>

⁶ The SFMO reports one person staffs the Regional Direct Delivery training. They train firefighters that are unable travel to North Bend.

⁷ Mobilization reports their allocated staff decreased to 1.5 FTEs 14 years ago due to a General Fund – State reduction that was never restored. The 1.5 FTEs assigned to the program has not changed even as the program's average number of incidents per year has tripled from 5.2 incidents to 17.1 incidents per fire season, and the average duration of each incident has increased by 148%.

Introduction

Authorizing legislation

The Fire Service Delivery Workgroup (Workgroup) was established by [Chapter 475, Laws of 2023 \(SB 5187\)](#). The workgroup was directed to evaluate existing funding and service delivery models for fire services provided by the State Fire Marshal's Office:

Sec. 916. (1) The fire service delivery work group is established.

(2) The executive director of the Washington fire chiefs or their designee must chair the work group. The work group is composed of the following additional members who serve without compensation or reimbursement for expenses:

- (a) The president of the Washington state council of firefighters or the president's designee;
- (b) The executive director of the Washington fire commissioners association or the director's designee;
- (c) The president of the Washington state fire fighters' association or the president's designee.

(3) Staff support for the work group must be provided by the department of commerce.

(4) The work group must evaluate existing funding and service delivery models of fire service functions including, but not limited to:

- (a) Fire service training and certifications;
- (b) Apprenticeships;
- (c) Risk mobilization;
- (d) Fire prevention;
- (e) Inspections and plan review;
- (f) Data collection;
- (g) Building codes and fire sprinkler and monitoring systems; and
- (h) Fireworks and fire safe cigarettes.

(5) The work group must report its findings and recommendations for the future delivery of these functions to the legislature and the governor by December 1, 2023. The work group may also convene a fire service summit to accomplish the goals of this section.

The Workgroup conducted seven work sessions, worked with multiple agencies to get fire service data, and hosted one statewide stakeholder meeting to prepare this report and meet the requirements of the proviso. The workgroup collaborated with Commerce to conduct the meetings, research, evaluations and recommendations.

Subject matter experts

The workgroup and Commerce collaborated with subject matter experts to gather necessary data that would allow the workgroup to evaluate fire service funding and delivery models.

Table 2: Subject matter experts consulted

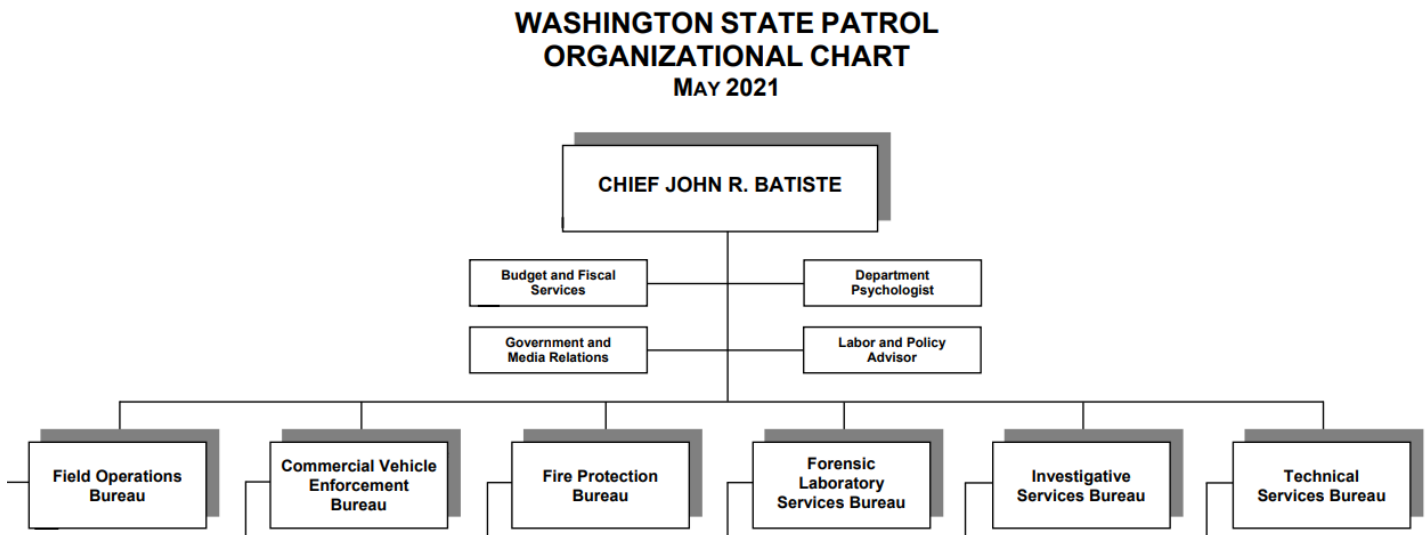
Name	Title
Jason Ashley	Captain, Human Resource Division of Washington State Patrol

Name	Title
John Batiste	Chief, Washington State Patrol
Daniel Berlant	California State Fire Marshal, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Candice Bock	Director of Government Relations, Association of Washington Cities
Mario Buono	Budget Manager, Washington State Patrol
Lonnie Click	Chief, Benton County Fire Protection District #1
Chad Cross	Washington State Fire Marshal, Washington State Fire Marshal's Office
David Kokot	Executive, Washington State Association of Fire Marshals
Matt Doumit	HR & Labor Relations Policy Analyst, Association of Washington Cities
Yvonne Ellison	Budget Management Analyst, Washington State Patrol
Sheila Gall	General Counsel, Association of Washington Cities
Melissa Gannie	Assistant State Fire Marshal, Washington State Fire Marshal's Office
Deion Glover	Commander of Government and Media Relations, Washington State Patrol
Debbie Groff	Child Care Licensing Area Administrator, Early Learning and Childcare Offices
Erik Hansen	Senior Budget Advisor, Washington State Department of Transportation
Travis Hansen	Regional Administrator, Washington State Department of Early Learning
Mike Harris	Fire Chief, Franklin County Fire District #3
Leonard Johnson	Fire Chief, McLane Black Lake Fire Department
Ray Lamoureux	Deputy Fire Chief, East Valley Fire Department
Suzanne Mayr	Director, Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board of Puget Sound
Bryan McConaughy	Government Relations Specialist, BMConsulting
Kelly Merz	Division Commander, Fire Training Commander
Nancy Morris	Fiscal Analyst, Washington State Office of the State Treasurer
Troy Nichols	Lobbyist, The Nichols Group
Scott Peterson	Field Representative, UA Sprinkler Fitters Local 699
Katie Rasmussen	Assistant Division Commander, Fire Training Academy
Mariana Ruiz-Temple	Oregon State Fire Marshal, Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office
Even Sent	Senior Researcher, Department of Retirement Systems
Barbara Serrano	Public Safety Senior Policy Advisor, Washington State Office of the Governor
William Slosson	Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal, Washington State Fire Marshal's Office
Jason Trout	Regional Manager, TNT Fireworks
Stacey Warick	Chief Financial Officer, Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner
Tiff West	Budget Advisor to the Governor, Transportation, Office of Financial Management
Gary West	Chief Deputy, National Association of State Fire Marshals
Marina Yee	Statewide Accountant, Washington State Office of Financial Management

Background

The State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) was moved from the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (now Commerce) into the Washington State Patrol in 1995. Washington State Patrol is organized into six bureaus, one of which is the Fire Protection Bureau. The Fire Protection Bureau is the home of the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO).

Figure 2: 2021 Washington State Patrol Organizational Chart



Source: Washington State Fire Marshal's Office

The SFMO is divided into two divisions, the Fire Training Division and the Fire Prevention Division. The Fire Training Division's mission is, "Training those who serve through facilitation, innovation, education and motivation."⁸ The Fire Prevention Division's mission is, "To be the best in fire and life safety and preparedness services."⁹ The SFMO reports that their values include investment in people, public safety, teamwork and collaboration, trust and accountability, and continuous improvement.

Responsibilities

The SFMO is directed by statute to provide:

- Fire service training and certifications ([RCW 43.43.934](#), [RCW 70.136.030](#) and [RCW 43.44.130](#))
- Apprenticeships ([RCW 43.43.944](#))
- Risk mobilization ([RCW 43.43.960](#))
- Prevention data collection and reporting ([RCW 43.44.060](#))
- Building code, fire sprinkler and monitoring system reviews and inspections ([RCW 19.27](#), [RCW 18.160](#), [RCW 18.270](#) and [RCW 43.44.130](#))
- Regulation of fireworks and fire safe cigarettes ([RCW 70.77](#) and [RCW 19.305](#))
- Fire investigations ([RCW 43.44.050](#))
- Inspections and plan reviews for:
 - Schools ([RCW 43.44.030](#))

⁸ Reported via email by the SFMO's Washington State Fire Training Academy reported their mission.

⁹ Reported via email by the SFMO's Washington State Fire Prevention Division.

- Assisted Living Facilities ([RCW 18.20.130](#))
- Residential Treatment Facilities and other facilities ([RCW 71.12.485](#))
- Interagency Agreements for:
 - Care of Children, Expectant Mothers, Persons with Developmental Disabilities ([RCW 74.15.050](#))
 - Child Care Centers ([RCW 43.216.250](#) and [43.216.265](#))
 - Enhanced Services Facilities ([RCW 70.97.210](#))
 - Hospitals licensed by Department of Health ([RCW 71.12.485](#))

Funding

The SFMO is funded by several sources including: 20% of the annual Fire Insurance Premium Tax, General Fund appropriations, hazardous substance tax, hazardous waste clean-up recoveries, federal grants, licenses, permits, fees, fines, forfeits, penalties, charges and miscellaneous revenue.

According to [Table 3](#) below, the largest contributor to the SFMO's budget is the Fire Service Training Account. The Fire Service Training Account is funded by:

- 20% of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax,
- Grants,
- Bequests, and
- Training fees.

Although 20% of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax revenue is deposited into the Fire Service Training Account (Training Account), Washington State Patrol's Budget Management Office explains that the Legislative appropriation from the Fire Service Training Account is not directly related to the Fire Insurance Premium Tax deposits.

The SFMO's portion of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax proceeds is deposited into the Training Account, but this account is subject to appropriation, which means that the SFMO's funding from the account has to be legislatively appropriated. The current Training Account budget is based upon the SFMO's legislatively approved activities that are appropriate for the account.

For the existing activities of the SFMO that are funded by the Training Account, compensation changes are made automatically as part of the legislative budget process, but any changes in workload or new activities that the SFMO wants to fund from the account must be requested through a decision package or legislative bill and approved by the Legislature.

Therefore, the SFMO's budget is based on their legislatively approved activities, not directly on the revenue to the Training Account.

The Budget Management Office also noted that revenue is important when it comes to the Training Account balance. If the Training Account does not have a sufficient fund balance to support the SFMO's current activities, the SFMO either must reduce their costs (stop doing something) or the Legislature has to provide funding from another source.

For new requests, if the funding is not sufficient to support it, the Legislature will either not approve it, or have to provide funding from another source.

The Fire Service Training Account is the SFMO's largest budget, but the bureau operates from a total of 10 accounts: General Fund - State (011), General Fund - State (012), Fire Service Trust Account (086), Disaster Response Account (05H-1B0(P)), the Fire Service Training Account (086), Fire Service Training Account K-12 (086-1e0/310), Firefighter Apprenticeship Program (086-1D0(P)) the Reduced Cigarette Ignition Propensity Account (14W-964(N/A)), the Model Toxics Control Operating Account (173/23P- 290), and the Fire Protection Contractor License Account (210 - 970).

Washington State Patrol's Budget Management Office provided a Total Bureau Budget chart that includes each funding source and the corresponding RCW fund authority. The chart compares the SFMO's budget in the 2013-2015 biennium to the budget in the 2021-2023 biennium.

Table 3: SFMO funding comparison, 2013-2023

Funds	Fund authority	2021-2023	2013-2015	Difference
011 - 011 General Fund - State	RCW 43.79.010	\$1,583,233	\$1,215,985	\$367,248
012 - 012 General Fund - State		\$1,716,236	\$1,009,170	\$707,066
03P - 250 Fire Service Trust Account State	RCW 43.43.946	\$131,000	\$131,000	\$ -
05H - 1B0(P)-Fire Service Mobilization	RCW 38.52.105 (proviso)	\$8,000,000	\$8,000,000	\$ -
086 - 1e0/310 Fire Service Training Acct - K-12	(was proviso until FY 2020)	\$293,362	\$200,000	\$93,362
086 - 1d0(P) Firefighter Apprenticeship Program	(proviso)	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$ -
086 - 310 Fire Service Training Acct	RCW 43.43.944	\$10,924,534	\$8,323,120	\$2,601,414
14W - 964 (N/A) Red Cigarette Ignition Prop	RCW 19.305.080	\$195,000	\$172,000	\$23,000
173/23P - 290 Model Toxics Control Operating Acct	RCW 70A.305.180 (formerly RCW 70.105D.190)	\$589,000	\$513,000	\$76,000
210 - 970 Fire Protection Contractor License	RCW 18.160.050	\$1,678,400	\$1,422,400	\$256,000
Totals:		\$25,810,765	\$21,686,675	\$4,124,090

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\) Inflation Calculator](#) indicates that \$1.00 in 2013 is equivalent to \$1.34 in September of 2023. If that is accepted as true, then the total 2013-15 biennial budget today would be equivalent to \$29,060,144.50 (\$21,686,675 x \$1.34). The SFMO's total budget in 2021-2023 is approximately \$3.3 million less than 2013-2015's total budget equivalent.

The SFMO's budget comparison in Table 3 above supports the Workgroup's concerns that over the last 10 years or more, the SFMO's funding and policy needs have not kept pace with Washington's population growth, the increased number of wildfires at the wildland urban interface, the increased frequency and duration of All-Risk Mobilization events, nor the requisite need for more firefighters to be trained. The SFMO reports that they are responsible for marshaling resources during expansive fires such as the Gray fire or the Oregon Road fire, but the SFMO is not provided additional staffing nor additional funding to adequately meet the increased demand for fire services.

Findings

Funding and fire service delivery challenges

During the Fire Service Delivery Statewide Stakeholder Meeting in September 2023, workgroup participants and statewide stakeholders agreed that the State Fire Marshal's Office has been significantly deprioritized and underfunded for the last 10 years or longer. The lack of state-level advocacy, insufficient wages and insufficient funding were reported as key barriers that threaten fire service delivery. Between the statewide stakeholders and the SFMO, the most commonly reported challenges for fire service funding and delivery were:

- The State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) does not report directly to the Governor, does not have a legislative liaison to provide state-level advocacy, and does not have the opportunity to regularly meet with fire service stakeholders to discuss and collectively determine fire service needs, according to the SFMO.
- The SFMO is experiencing significant staff vacancies and is challenged to retain employees.¹⁰
- Local fire departments pay 35% to 55% more than the SFMO for equivalent positions and require less invasive background checks, making it difficult for the SFMO to fill their numerous staff vacancies.¹¹
- Inadequate funding for firefighter training creates unequal access to training opportunities, especially in rural and economically vulnerable areas that cannot afford to travel to the Training Academy. Inaccessible firefighter training risks the safety of historically marginalized communities, their firefighters and the natural environments.¹²
- Lack of funding prevents the SFMO's mobilization program from expanding their staff to appropriate levels.¹³
- Four statutorily required services are not provided by the SFMO, including fire investigations, because they are not funded, as reported by the SFMO.
- The SFMO states their Information Technology is outdated, inefficient and time-intensive.

Underrepresented state-level advocacy

One legislative liaison represents the six bureaus housed in the Washington State Patrol. According to WSP's website, "the legislative liaison is responsible for coordinating agency legislation with legislators, committees, and other state agencies."¹⁴ Being one of six bureaus, the SFMO does not have a dedicated legislative liaison to advocate solely for fire service needs at the state level. The Workgroup feels that the missing state-level representation is related to the SFMO's funding challenges and subsequent impacts.

Over the last 10 years, just 3.4% of the SFMO's policy level budget requests were funded.¹⁵ Additionally, legislative attempts to increase funding for the Fire Service Training Account, such as [SB 5520 \(2023\)](#), did not pass the Legislature. The SFMO and WSP's Budget Management reported the various impacts resulting from years of insufficient funding:

¹⁰ SFMO reports 83% of part-time Fire Training positions, 20% of full-time Fire Training positions, and 17% of full-time Prevention positions are vacant as of October 2023.

¹¹ Washington State Office of Financial Management, "2022 Washington State Employees Compensation Survey Report," Sept. 27, 2023, https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/shr/CompensationAndJobClasses/Salary%20Surveys/2022WSECS/2022_WSECS_State_Report_04-2022.pdf

¹² SFMO reports one person staffs the Regional Direct Delivery (RDD) training, which trains firefighters unable to travel to North Bend.

¹³ The SFMO's 2023-2025 Budget Request includes a request for additional staff, software and reimbursements for the All-Risk Mobilization Program.

¹⁴ Washington State Patrol, "Office of the Chief," October 18, 2023, <https://www.wsp.wa.gov/about-us/bureaus/>

¹⁵ The SFMO's 2013-2023 Budget Requests are included in [Appendix B](#) of this report.

- The Fire Service Training Account's year-end balance declined by almost 80% over the last 12 years.¹⁶
- The SFMO offered 26% fewer Hazardous Materials Training courses and trained almost 50% fewer students in 2023 compared to 2016.
- The SFMO delivered almost 70% fewer fireworks trainings in 2023 compared to 2015.

Table 4: Hazardous materials training data

Year	Courses	Trainees
2016	42	923
2017	50	1,978
2018	36	712
2019	33	1,744
2020	N/A	N/A
2021	22	1,740
2022	50	900
2023	31	519

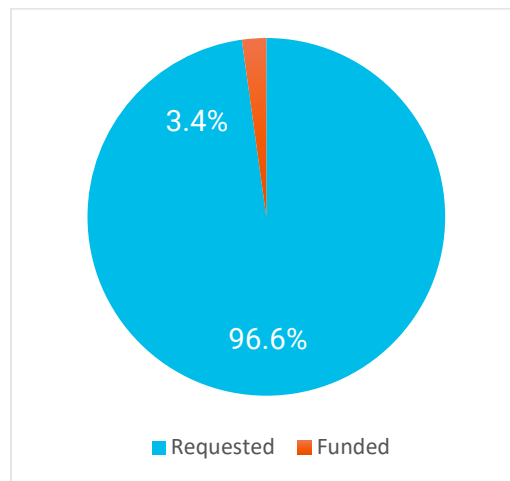
Table 5: Fireworks training data

Year	Trainees
2015	175
2016	114
2017	26
2018	0
2019	75
2020	0
2021	0
2022	0
2023	0

WSP's Budget Management Office reports that each year the SFMO submits a Budget Request to the Office of Financial Management. WSP's Budget Management Office provided the SFMO's 2013-2023 Budget Requests, which are included in [Appendix A](#). Two budget request items from the 2013 - 2023 Budget Requests had to be funded: the annual mobilization reimbursements (which reimburse local jurisdictions for their expenses incurred during each mobilization) and 2021's emergency Fire Training Academy maintenance appropriation (a severe winter storm significantly damaged the academy requiring emergency repairs). When mobilization and the one-time appropriation for Fire Training Academy maintenance costs are set aside, the SFMO Budget Request analysis reveals that just 3.4% of the SFMO budget requests were funded in the last 10 years.

¹⁶ Appendices A and B include Washington State Patrol's Budget Management Office's data.

Figure 3: 2013-2023 percentage of funded and unfunded SFMO's budget requests¹⁷



Source: Washington State Patrol's Budget Office

Missing opportunities to collaborate

During the Workgroup's evaluation process, the group hosted a hybrid statewide stakeholder meeting for fire service delivery stakeholders. The meeting included a broad swath of fire service stakeholders including all named members of the workgroup, the State Fire Marshal's Office, Washington State Association of Fire Marshals, state licensing stakeholders, childcare facility owners, and industry representatives from fire sprinkler fitters to fireworks representatives. At the end of meeting, all stakeholders in the room agreed that the opportunity to come together as fire service stakeholders was educational, beneficial and appreciated.

Experiencing the value of a statewide stakeholder meeting highlighted the communication and engagement gap amongst various fire service providers. It became apparent that the SFMO, statewide fire service stakeholders and WSP do not have an opportunity to meet to discuss state fire service needs, negating WSP's chance to learn about critical issues in state fire service. Meeting attendees noted that the lack of communication and collaboration reduces fire service stakeholders' ability to collectively determine key priorities and then jointly advocate for those priorities at the state level.

Recruitment and retention

As of October 2023, the SFMO reported 83% of their part-time Fire Training positions were vacant, 20% of their full-time Fire Training positions were vacant, and 17% of their full-time Prevention positions were vacant.

The SFMO shared that they struggle to recruit qualified applicants to fill the necessary roles within the Bureau. Although they have successfully recruited and developed existing employees to advance within the office, those advancements have primarily been in the prevention and inspection industry.

Wage disparities

Other positions, primarily within the Training Division, require requisite experience prior to hire. These individuals ideally would be hired out of the Washington State Fire Service, but local fire departments pay 35%

¹⁷ This illustration only includes non-obligatory, policy level requests. It does not include obligatory mobilization and emergency maintenance allocations, or the 2015 Deputy State Fire Marshal position that the Office of Financial Management eliminated and restored the same year.

to 55% more than the SFMO for equivalent positions¹⁸, according to the Office of Financial Management's 2022 Compensation Survey Report. Consequently, the SFMO struggles to recruit and retain employees.

The SFMO communicated that turnover for existing SFMO employees has been another issue impacting the staff vacancies. Local fire agencies hire personnel at competitive industry wages and often offer Law Enforcement Officer and Fire Fighter 2 (LEOFF 2) retirement plans. The SFMO's significantly lower wages and Public Employee Retirement Plan cannot compete with local agencies' offerings, increasing the SFMO's turnover rates. Although the SFMO successfully pursued pay increases to reduce the compensation gap, the Office of Financial Management's [2022 Compensation Survey Report](#) highlights that pay increases clearly have not been enough to match what local fire jurisdictions are offering.

Hiring requirements

WSP has a hiring policy which automatically disqualifies any individual who exceeds a lifetime limit of five instances of usage of both illegal drugs and prescription drugs used recreationally. According to WSP's Human Resources Division, past usage of Adderall has often been a problem, due to its popularity among college-age students. Regardless of the number of years that may have passed since the applicants used a drug more than five times, they are automatically ineligible for hire, including those in noncommissioned positions.

WSP's hiring policy up through September 2023 automatically disqualified any applicant who had used marijuana within the past 12 months - even noncommissioned staff (staff who do not carry a weapon) such as administrative assistants, maintenance supervisors and event coordinators. **WSP's Human Resources reported WSP lost almost 2,000 applicants for civilian positions in 2023 solely for using marijuana within the past 12 months.** More people may not have applied because they saw the marijuana standard and self-screened out. However, WSP amended this hiring policy in the end of 2023. WSP no longer disqualifies a civilian-position applicant for using marijuana within the past 12 months.

Staff vacancies and recruitment barriers significantly affect Washington's firefighter trainings. With 83% of part-time training positions vacant, and 20% of full-time training positions vacant, the need to address both the wage disparities and recruitment barriers is critical. Until the SFMO fills their firefighter-training vacancies, fewer firefighters will receive training, leaving our communities at serious risk of significant adverse impacts during public emergency events.

Firefighter training is in jeopardy

The State Fire Marshal's Office reported that it may have to cancel Washington's training courses vital to volunteer and career firefighters due to insufficient funding for the Fire Service Training Account. They provide six training programs, and they are in jeopardy due to declining funding.

Table 6: State Fire Marshal's Office training programs

Fire Prevention Division's firefighter trainings	Fire Training Academy's firefighter trainings
Firefighter Professional Development Certifications (offers 21 certifications)	Basic Firefighter 1 and 2 Training

¹⁸ Washington State Office of Financial Management, "2022 Washington State Employees Compensation Survey Report," Sep. 27, 2023, https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/shr/CompensationAndJobClasses/Salary%20Surveys/2022WSECS/2022_WSECS_State_Report_04-2022.pdf

Fire Prevention Division's firefighter trainings	Fire Training Academy's firefighter trainings
Hazardous Materials Training	Regional Direct Delivery
Basic Firefighter Training Reimbursement	Joint Apprenticeship and Training

The Fire Service Training Account is funded primarily through a 20% share of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax. The Washington State Department of Revenue explains that Fire Insurance Premium Tax is a tax that insurers pay based on the premiums they receive from their policyholders. Insurance companies file tax returns by March 1, reporting premiums received during the previous calendar year.¹⁹The Office of the Insurance Commissioner shared that the total Fire Insurance Premium Tax they collect by the end of the calendar year is distributed to the appropriate accounts in May of the next year. For example, total fire tax collected from Jan 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022 is distributed in May 2023.

Distributions of Fire Insurance Premium Tax Revenues²⁰:

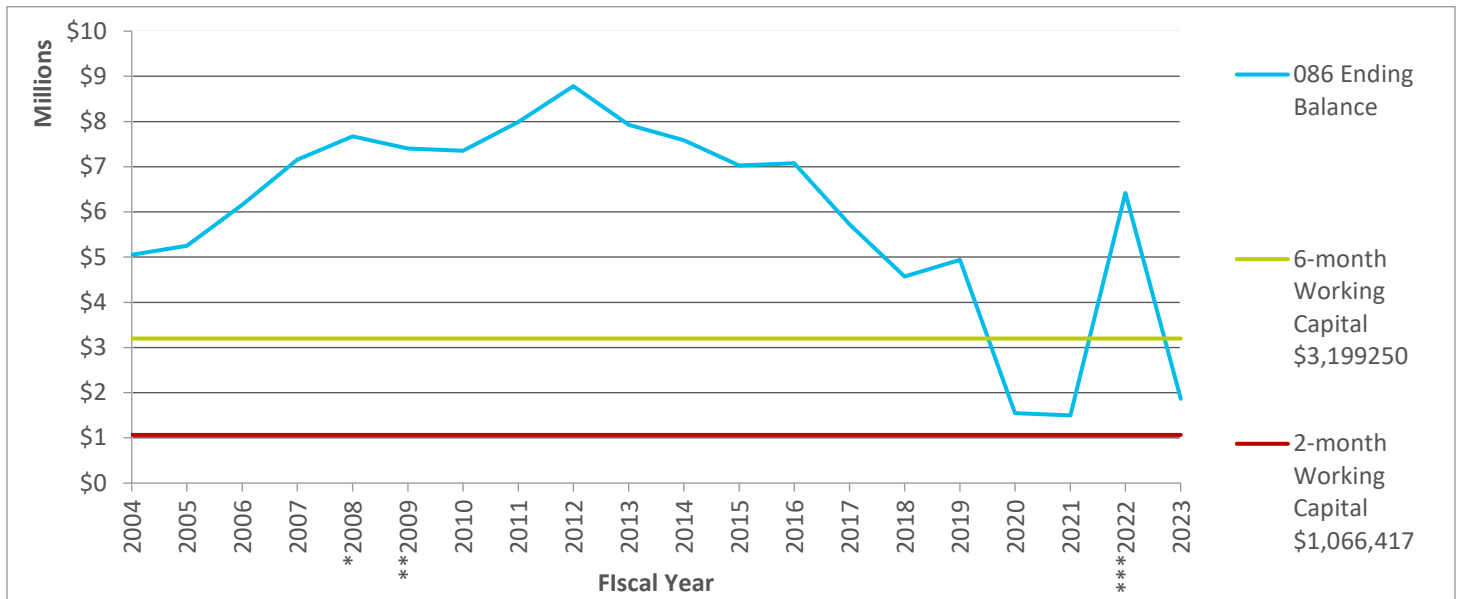
- 15% to the state's General Fund
- 40% to the Volunteer Firemen's Relief and Pension Fund;
- 25% to cities' Firemen's Pension Funds; and
- 20% to the Fire Service Training Account

The SFMO reports that the Fire Training Academy (FTA) funding has steeply declined for more than 10 years, impacting firefighter training and maintenance of the Fire Training Academy. Additionally, funding availability for other training entities, such as the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC), is also reduced, preventing the expansion of this imperative training organization dedicated to career firefighter development.

¹⁹ Washington State Department of Revenue, "Insurance Premium Tax," October 19, 2023, https://dor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/13_Insurance_Premiums.pdf

²⁰ [Appendix E](#) includes all Fire Insurance Premium Tax Distributions from 2014-2023.

Figure 4: Firefighter Training Account (086) funding, 2012-2023



*FY 2008 balance includes \$250,000 GF-S transfer in to establish Joint Firefighter Apprenticeship Program.

** FY2009 balance includes \$1,462,719.77 in Debt Service received for Dormitory Construction.

***FY2022 balance includes \$7,094,005.86 in Debt Service received for Burn Building Replacement Construction.

Source: Washington State Patrol's Budget Office

The SFMO reports that without increasing the Fire Service Training Account's portion of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax revenue or providing additional allocations, the funding to support the Washington State Fire Service will continue to fall short of the needs, resulting in both short-term and long-term impacts. The SFMO anticipates a reduction in basic fire service training and potential elimination of advanced and specialty training without additional funding.

Training is vital to responder safety and the protection of community members and the environment, as noted by the Workgroup. The declining Fire Service Training Account (in Figure 4 above) is unable to sustain firefighter training at the Fire Training Academy, Regional Direct Delivery trainings (which provide onsite trainings to fire departments that cannot travel to the FTA), and Joint Apprenticeship Training (which provides accredited recruit academy training, hazardous materials training, Emergency Medical Technician training, on the job training and academic instruction).

According to the WSP's Biennial Budget Decision Package for Regional Direct Delivery (RDD) cited in [Appendix C](#), rural and economically vulnerable firefighters are already experiencing disproportionate barriers to accessing firefighting training because only one staff person currently provides the statewide RDD trainings. The SFMO's RDD budget request was unfunded in 2023,²¹ which may risk increasing the disproportionate negative impacts to the communities, firefighters and the natural environment in those areas.

Without these vital training programs, volunteer and career firefighters will experience a reduction in training opportunities and career development across the state, which may compromise the safety of Washington's communities.

²¹ [Appendix B](#) includes the SFMO's 2013-2023 Budget Requests.

Mobilization program

The SFMO is responsible for providing the state's All-Risk Mobilization Program ([RCW 43.43.962](#)). In a September 2023 meeting for the Fire Service Delivery Report between Commerce and the SFMO, the SFMO reported the following: the Mobilization Program is a year-round, all-risk program, designed to support any large-scale incident that any fire department may need statewide assistance to mitigate. Originally, the Mobilization Program provided wildfire, and only wildfire, mobilization assistance. However, it became the All-Risk Mobilization Program within the last 10 years, requiring year-round staffing and oversight.

The Mobilization Program provided the following information:

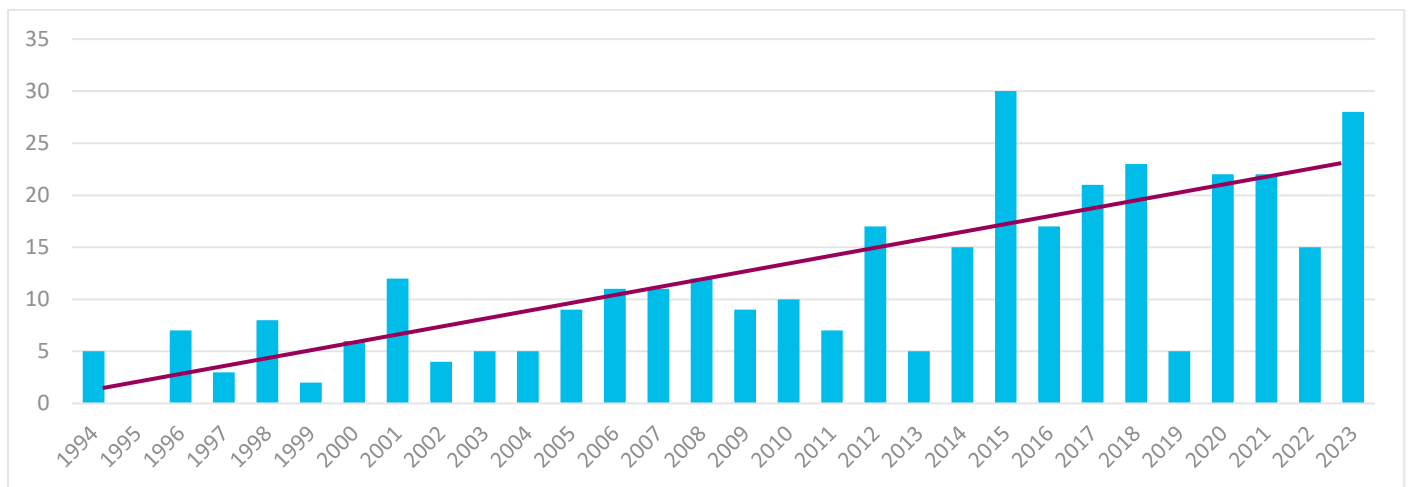
The Mobilization Program is different from Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) response. DNR's authority in [RCW 76.04](#) is solely for wildfires on forested lands under DNR's protection. The SFMO pointed out that the vast majority of the lower Columbia Basin, including Benton, Franklin, Adams and Walla Walla Counties have thousands of acres with no DNR protection.

If a non-wildfire incident, such as a hazardous materials incident, occurred on lands protected by DNR (but within a fire district), the incident would not get a DNR response; it would get a fire department response. If that incident expanded to need more resources, up to Mobilization, the DNR still would not be the lead agency, and would only coordinate those resources in accordance with the Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.

The state's Mobilization Program leads the coordinated statewide response when an emergency event such as a catastrophic earthquake exhausts local resources. All cities, fire districts, and regional fire authorities are eligible to request Mobilization assistance, and are not required to have a contract or agreement with WSP prior to their request.

Once demobilization occurs, the SFMO must process payments affiliated with the authorized mobilizations, maintain the Washington State Fire Services Resource Mobilization Plan, and work closely with local stakeholder groups continuously to improve the program and response to evolving All Hazard emergencies. In the last 10 years, the Mobilization program reported they processed more than 50,000 reimbursement claims.

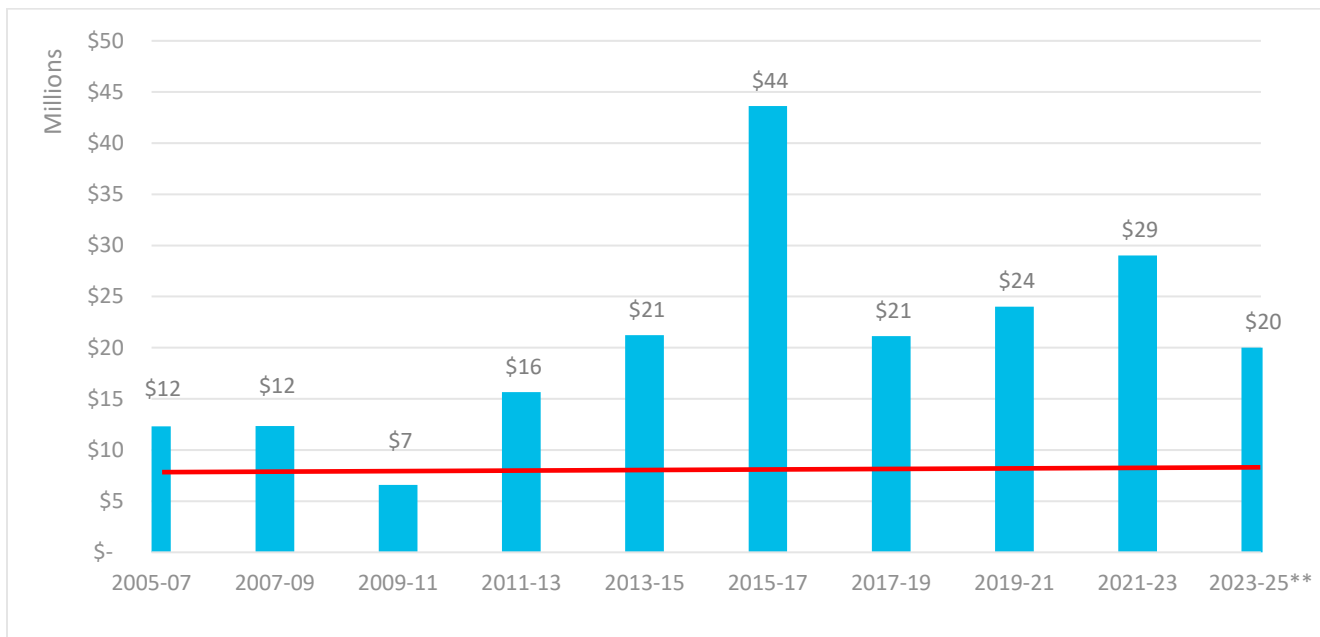
Figure 5: Number of mobilization incidents from 1994 through 2022



Source: Washington State Fire Service's Mobilization Program

Importantly, Mobilization's \$8 million biennial appropriation has not increased in approximately 20 years, although services expanded and the number of incidents continue to grow. The program's average number of incidents per year has tripled from 5.2 incidents to 17.1 incidents per fire season, and the average amount of time each incident required increased 148%. The average biennium fire costs currently exceed \$21 million.

Figure 6: Biennial mobilization costs 2005 - 2025 compared to \$8M allocated funding

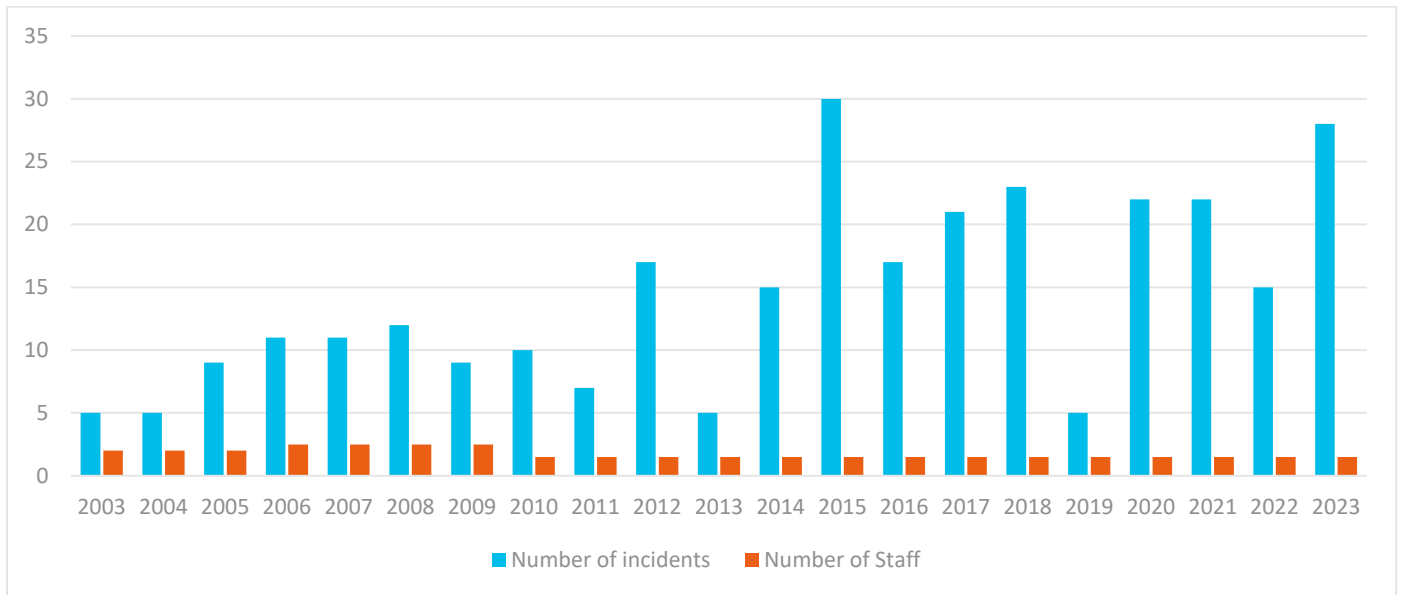


** Estimated cost total

Source: Washington State Fire Service's Mobilization Program

Additionally, mobilization has fewer staff today than it did 20 years ago, even though incidents tripled and the duration of each incident increased significantly. Currently, one FTE is dedicated to mobilization, and one part-time position manages training. Fourteen years ago mobilization's number of dedicated staff decreased from 2.5 FTE to 1.5 FTE due to a General Fund – State reduction that was not restored.

Figure 7: Number of mobilization incidents compared to number of mobilization staff



Source: Washington State Fire Service's Mobilization Program

According to the SFMO, the most significant impact resulting from the understaffed Mobilization Program is two-fold: there are not enough SFMO personnel to staff the number of incidents, and not enough staff to process payments to the fire service in a timely manner.

Elaborating on the impacts of understaffing, the Mobilization Program provided the following information:

In 2023, there were periods where multiple fire incidents were occurring simultaneously in different counties throughout the state, forcing the Mobilization Program to leave incidents without SFMO staff to accurately track costs/resources, and exposing incident personnel to inadequate support to accomplish the mission.

Personnel impacts to an understaffed SFMO include three periods in 2023 where mobilization deployed staff for more than two continuous weeks, staffing multiple fires at once. When deployment assignments were over, there were no mandatory days off. Staff went right back to work, and when it was busy, right back to another fire in a couple of days. Mobilization has lost employees because of this, and had candidates turn down job offers when they realized the full weight of the job and the complete absence of work/life balance from June to October.

Mobilization's understaffing also causes a significant delay in getting payments made to volunteer firefighters, fire departments, and contractors and vendors, well outside of what is specified in the agreements with both the fire agencies and the vendors.

Volunteer firefighters wait more than 60 days to be paid. Fire departments often must wait well past that, 90-120 days or more. That is well outside the guidance provided to pay bills in the Office of Financial Management's State Agency Accounting Manual.

Local fire agencies that cannot afford to wait for reimbursement may not participate in the mobilization effort, reducing the help available to communities and the natural environment experiencing an emergency.

Because the All-Risk Mobilization Program is critically understaffed, people's safety and the natural environment's health is in jeopardy during a significant emergency event such as a substantial wildfire, hazardous gas pipeline accident or large-scale earthquake.

Unfunded statutory requirements

The SFMO does not provide four statutorily required mandates because they are not funded, including fire investigations. The unfunded obligations compromise preventative efforts to reduce fire occurrences and fire impacts. The four unfunded mandates include:

- Fire investigation services ([RCW 43.44.050](#));
- Preparing for hazmat accidents ([RCW 43.44.130](#));
- Enforcing smoke detection devices ([RCW 43.44.110](#)); and
- Inspecting and enforcing building code requirements ([RCW 19.27.730](#)).

The SFMO is mandated to investigate fires of a criminal, suspected, or undetermined caused when local jurisdiction requests assistance. Prior to the SFMO being moved to the WSP, funding was eliminated for this program and has not been re-appropriated. The SFMO receives requests for fire investigation services, and refers requestors to the federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) or other entities who have some capacity to fill this role.

In recent months, the SFMO stated they received feedback from ATF agents that there is dissatisfaction that the SFMO no longer provides this service, and that this action is impacting local and federal agencies. The Washington State Fire Service is limited from fully understanding and preventing impacts of arson across the state when they cannot properly investigate fires due to lack of resources available to respond.

Technology modernization feasibility study

The SFMO reported that their current processes are out-of-date, not within best practices, are heavily reliant on paper, require in-person instruction, and do not maximize information technology resources. In an effort to address the problem, the SFMO received funding to complete a technology modernization study that will assess all SFMO services and provide recommendations for technology funding. After the study is completed in late 2024, decision packages will be submitted that seek funding for the identified enhancements.

Recommendations

To ensure Washington is prepared to meet statewide fire defense needs, the Workgroup recommends both short-term and long-term strategies. In the long-term, the Workgroup recommends enhanced state-level representation, improvements to recruitment and retention, and consideration of the recommendations from the technology modernization study that is in progress. In the short-term, the Workgroup recommends adequate funding for firefighter training, mobilization, and all statutory functions.

State-level representation

The Workgroup recommends that the Legislature take steps toward establishing an independent agency for the SFMO by establishing a roadmap workgroup.

A. Roadmap workgroup

The Legislature should convene a two-year workgroup to study the elements required to establish an independent agency for the SFMO including a timeline for each step of the process. All requisite personnel, records, office and equipment needs should be itemized with approximate cost estimates. The workgroup should also outline a plan for the transfer of the WSP Fire Protection Bureau/State Fire Marshal's Office from the WSP to an independent SFMO agency.

B. Legislative liaison

Until the agency is formed, the Workgroup also recommends establishing a legislative liaison position dedicated exclusively to representing fire service stakeholders and the SFMO.

C. Fire service advisory committee

To foster communication, collaboration and united advocacy efforts at the state level, the Workgroup recommends establishing a Fire Service Advisory Committee with a low-cost board structure²² to be housed under WSP. The state should provide personnel services to assist the advisory committee within the limits of available funds.

The committee members should include the five following members, as well as two at-large positions: the Executive Director of Washington Fire Chiefs (as committee chair); the President of the Washington State Council of Firefighters; the Executive Director of the Washington Fire Commissioners Association; the President of the Washington State Fire Fighters' Association; and the President of the Washington State Association of Fire Marshals. The committee would encourage and accept the State Fire Marshal to attend meetings as a non-voting member. The workgroup would like the State Fire Marshal to be responsive to the advisory committee.

Regular committee meetings would provide the opportunity for statewide fire service stakeholders to meet, discuss and determine essential fire service needs. The committee would work with the SFMO's legislative liaison, the SFMO, WSP and others to educate and advocate for fire service funding and policy needs.

Recruitment and retention

Staff salaries and hiring policies must achieve parity with local fire jurisdictions to address the SFMO's recruitment and retention issues.

²² Model policy for compensating part-time committee participants detailed in [RCW 43.03.220](#).

D. Wage parity

For staff salaries, the Workgroup recommends following the model salary policy recently established in [RCW 43.43.380](#) for WSP's Troopers and Sergeants. In short, the SFMO minimum monthly salaries must be competitive with local fire service agencies within the boundaries of Washington, guided by the results of a survey undertaken in the collective bargaining process during each biennium.

[RCW 43.43.380](#) clarifies how comparative salary levels should be calculated. Adapting the language to apply to fire service would suggest that comparisons for determining competitiveness with local fire agencies' salary levels should be guided by the average compensation paid to the corresponding rank from the Seattle Fire Department, King County Fire Districts, South King County Fire and Rescue, Tacoma Fire Department, Snohomish Regional Fire and Rescue, Spokane Fire Department, and Vancouver Fire Department. Compensation should be calculated using base salary, premium pay (a pay received by more than a majority of employees), education pay, longevity pay and an inflation-based multiplier.

E. Hiring practices

WSP changed their hiring policy in 2023 so that job applicants will no longer be disqualified for the use of marijuana in the past 12 months. However, WSP continues to prohibit noncommissioned staff from using cannabis when off-the-job and away from the workplace. The workgroup recommends that WSP prohibit marijuana use during working hours, and prohibit civilian employees being under the influence of marijuana in the workplace.

Enable adequate funding for training, mobilization and statutory functions

The Workgroup recommends adequate funding for training firefighters to keep all people in Washington safe, to enhance the SFMO's ability to mobilize and respond to emergencies and to provide all its statutorily required functions.

F. Firefighter training

The Workgroup recommends adequate funding for all firefighting training programs provided by the SFMO. SFMO's firefighter training programs ensure firefighters have proper mastery over operational procedures to manage fire environments and large-scale emergencies safely.

If additional funding were allocated for firefighter training, the SFMO anticipates the following outcomes:

- The SFMO will be able to expand training across the state, including for new apprentices currently on the waiting list.
- Statewide support for all of Washington's tribal, regional, county and city governments, including outreach to underserved communities to provide training tailored to the needs of the fire agencies.
- The Fire Training Academy (FTA) will have the funding necessary to complete the projects outlined in the current FTA Master Plan within the 20-year outlook, which includes capital projects.
- Once fully implemented, The Master Plan will serve as a statewide resource for emergency responders.
- Increased funding will enable the FTA to utilize the Fire Service Training Account to continue capital improvement projects without affecting the overall health of the account.

G. Mobilization program

The Workgroup recommends that the state allocate sufficient funding to the All-Risk Mobilization Program for their staffing needs. The mobilization program reports needing six additional personnel: one Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal, three Deputy State Fire Marshals, one Information Technology Applications Development –

Journey Level, and one Fiscal Technician 3. Policies should ensure that staff or position increases will not reduce the funding available for the WSP or the SFMO.

Community safety will be prioritized when the mobilization program receives the funding necessary to increase the number of people participating in the emergency response effort. As staff vacancy rates increase, workload increases. This dynamic requires technology improvements to increase efficiency and there is nexus with recommendation I and the forthcoming Technology Modernization Feasibility Study.

H. Unfunded statutory requirements

The workgroup recommends funding all of the SFMO's unfunded mandates including: fire investigation services ([RCW 43.44.050](#)); preparing for hazmat accidents ([RCW 43.44.130](#)); enforcing smoke detection devices ([RCW 43.44.110](#)); and inspecting and enforcing building code requirements ([RCW 19.27.730](#)).

If unfunded responsibilities are adequately funded, the SFMO will be able to identify hazards, pinpoint dangerous practices and prevent future fires by providing regular investigations, inspections and enforcement.

I. Technology Modernization Feasibility Study

The Workgroup recommends the state implement and fully fund the technology modernization feasibility study's recommendations. They are expected to be complete by the end of 2024.

Technology updates will potentially create virtual training opportunities and they will improve efficiency with processing reimbursement claims, license applications and renewals, and fee payments. Thanks to the technology's efficiency, SFMO's costs could be reduced over the long-term, cybersecurity will be improved, and data protection practices will be advanced, ideal outcomes for all.

Recommendations out of scope

While evaluating fire service funding and delivery, issues came up that were out of scope but are important nonetheless. In recognition of these important issues, the Workgroup makes the following recommendations:

- Identify and implement the policy changes necessary to ensure all local jurisdictions that employed LEOFF 1 firefighters receive their proportionate share of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax. Currently, 13% of LEOFF 1 firefighters reside in jurisdictions that do not receive the Fire Insurance Premium Tax.
- Establish a future legislative study examining Fire Insurance Premium Tax Distributions with the goal of recommending a new distribution formula. The study could investigate actuarial evaluations of all accounts receiving the tax, identify the number of pre-LEOFF 1 firefighters in local jurisdictions, and analyze the potential inequities resulting from Firefighter Pension Levies that cities are only allowed to run - without voter approval - if they established a Firefighter Pension Fund prior to the establishment of LEOFF 1.

Conclusions

Washington's State Patrol and State Fire Marshal's Office have seen significant changes since they were integrated in the 1990's. The state's population, demographics, public safety expectations and risk of hazards have substantially grown, diversified and evolved. This is an opportunity to adapt to the changing needs of people in Washington and begin working towards short-term and long-term improvements for the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO).

Establishing an independent SFMO agency could likely address the Workgroup's primary findings and the Workgroup feels this long-term pursuit is needed. With sufficient funding, revised policies, adequate staffing and updated technology, the SFMO will be well prepared to deliver their meaningful statewide safety programs.

Appendix A: (086) Fire Service Training Account

Table 7: Fire Service Training Account (086) 2012-2023 Ending Balance Changes

Fiscal Year	086 Account Starting Balance	086 Account Ending Balance	Change in Fund Balance
FY 2012	\$7,991,094	\$8,783,470	\$792,375
FY 2013	\$8,783,470	\$7,927,184	(\$856,285.31)
FY 2014	\$7,927,184	\$7,590,238	(\$336,946.99)
FY 2015	\$7,590,238	\$7,031,558	(\$558,679.30)
FY 2016	\$7,031,558	\$7,080,984	\$49,426
FY 2017	\$7,080,984	\$5,726,772	(\$1,354,212)
FY 2018	\$5,726,772	\$4,570,788	(\$1,155,983.89)
FY 2019	\$4,570,788	\$4,937,598	\$366,809
FY 2020	\$4,937,598	\$1,545,492	(\$3,392,105)
FY 2021	\$1,545,492	\$1,498,702	(\$46,789)
FY 2022	\$1,498,702	\$6,419,824	\$4,921,121
FY 2023	\$6,419,824	\$1,813,326	(\$4,606,497)
		Total Change in Fund Balance	(\$6,177,767)

Appendix B: Budget requests

Table 8: Budge requests for the State Fire Marshal's Office, 2013-2023

Session	Budget items	Requested	Funded	Difference
2013 Legislative Session				
	M2-EC Fire Mobilizations - 2013 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$11,859,006	\$9,668,000	(\$2,191,006)
2015 Legislative Session				
	M2-EA Fire Mobilizations - 2015 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$14,298,000	\$13,292,000	(\$1,006,000)
	PL-A2 Reduce Deputy State Fire Marshals (OFM Directed DP)	(\$446,000)	\$ -	\$446,000
	PL-P2 Restore Deputy State Fire Marshals (OFM Directed DP)	\$446,000	\$ -	(\$446,000)
2016 Legislative Session				
	M2-MG Fire Mobilizations - 2016 Supplemental Budget -PLACEHOLDER	\$23,645,000	\$34,365,000	\$10,720,000
2017 Legislative Session				
	M2-MB Fire Mobilizations - 2017 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$2,000,000	\$14,500,000	\$12,500,000
	PL-PI Fire Training Academy Regional Direct Delivery Program Staffing	\$977,000	\$ -	(\$977,000)
2018 Legislative Session				
	M2-UB Fire Mobilizations - 2018 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$10,950,000	\$7,050,000	(\$3,900,000)
2019 Legislative Session				
	M2-UB Fire Mobilizations - 2019 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$4,975,000	\$4,975,000	\$ -
2020 Legislative Session				
	ML-M4 Fire and Life Safety Inspection Staff	\$66,000	\$66,000	\$ -
2021 Legislative Session				
	M2-UB Fire Mobilizations - 2021 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$8,030,000	\$10,470,000	\$2,440,000
	ML-A7 Fire Training Academy Maintenance	\$928,000	\$928,000	\$ -
2022 Legislative Session				
	M2-UB Fire Mobilizations - 2022 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$12,000,000	\$4,000,000	(\$8,000,000)
2023 Legislative Session				
	M2-UB Fire Mobilizations - 2023 Supplemental Budget - PLACEHOLDER	\$10,315,000	\$16,130,000	\$5,815,000
	PL-D3 Fire Protection Records Modernization Feasibility Study	\$408,000	\$408,000	\$ -

Session	Budget items	Requested	Funded	Difference
	PL-K1 MOBE and NFIRS Program Support	\$9,662,000	\$ -	(\$9,662,000)
	PL-K2 Regional Direct Delivery Support	\$1,111,000	\$ -	(\$1,111,000)
Total		\$111,224,006	\$115,852,000	\$4,627,994

Source: Washington State Department of Revenue 2007 Tax Reference Manual

Appendix C: Regional Direct Delivery Program, 2023-25 Decision Package

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET DECISION PACKAGE²³

Agency: 2250 – Washington State Patrol

DP Code-Title: K2 – Regional Direct Delivery Program Support

Budget Period: 2023-25 Biennial

Budget Level: Policy

Contact Name: Kelly Merz

Contact Phone: (425) 453-3000

Contact Email: kelly.merz@wsp.wa.gov

Agency Recommendation Summary (RecSum):

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) requests funding in our State Fire Marshal’s Office (SFMO) for additional staff and training resources for the Regional Direct Delivery Program (RDDP).

Fiscal Detail

(Dollars in thousands)

Operating Expenditures	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Fund 001-01*	\$600	\$511	\$511	\$511
Total Expenditures	\$600	\$511	\$511	\$511
Biennial Totals	\$1,111		\$1,022	
Staffing	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
FTEs	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Average Annual	2.0		2.0	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Object A - Salaries	\$157	\$157	\$157	\$157
Object B - Benefits	\$60	\$60	\$60	\$60
Object C - Professional Srv. Contracts	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100
Object E - Goods and Services	\$52	\$50	\$50	\$50
Object G - Travel	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5
Object J - Capital Outlays	\$106	\$20	\$20	\$20
Object T - Indirect Costs	\$120	\$119	\$119	\$119

²³ Note: The decision package was obtained from the Office of Financial Management’s Agency Budget Requests System (<https://abr.ofm.wa.gov/>) and adapted into this report without substantive edit.

Package Description

What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?

Our SFMO manages two firefighter basic training programs that support and help offset the financial costs to local fire districts; the Basic Firefighter Reimbursement Program (BFFRP) and the RDDP. These programs ensure both volunteer and career firefighters have access to training that will increase the health and safety within the fire service to better serve our communities. Per RCW 43.43.934, the funding for these programs is currently linked in such a way that increasing resources for the RDDP will also require increasing the reimbursement rates of the BFFRP. This creates a conflict of interest between the programs because, as more students are trained through RDDP, the reimbursement rates for the BFFRP also increase, reducing the funding available to expand the RDDP.

The RDDP provides training to rural volunteer fire districts that lack the resources to utilize the BFFRP and there is a clear need to expand the program to better fill this need. However, the current reimbursement structure for the BFFRP directly reduces the resources available for the RDDP, and risks de-incentivizing districts that would be better served utilizing the RDDP by making BFFRP reimbursements more attractive.

What is your proposal?

Our proposal to address this issue is twofold. We are separately requesting a language revision in RCW 43.43.934(1)(B)(ii)(A) to separate the two programs so that each one is its own standalone program, and in this proposal we request funding for additional staff and training resources to expand the RDDP. Many rural fire agencies do not have the staff needed to provide basic firefighter training for their volunteers and rely on the RDDP. The RDDP has proven to be a huge asset to the state fire services, but has been hindered by a lack of funding and resources.

What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?

This request is for two Deputy State Fire Marshal (DSFM) FTEs and related support costs, including certified contract instructors to provide direct instruction, and the training materials necessary to allow us to meet the growing needs of the RDDP.

The funding source requested for this proposal is General Fund-State because of current fund balance concerns for the Fire Service Training Account (086), but we have submitted a legislative request for a distribution change of the Fire Insurance Premium Tax that would resolve this issue. If approved, the Fire Service Training Account is an appropriate funding source for this request.

What alternatives did you explore and why was this option chosen?

Since the two programs are tied together and compete for the same funding, one program suffers for the other, and previously that has been the RDDP. If we do not receive additional funding, we will be limited to maintaining the current level of service, which does not adequately meet the current need for the RDDP.

One individual currently manages the RDDP, and through the program, over 1,000 firefighters are trained each year, but this level of staffing cannot support any growth of the program. By adding two DSFM FTEs, the program can far exceed what has been previously accomplished.

Performance Measures

Performance Outcomes

With more staff, we will be able to train more firefighters and further develop the program rather than just maintain it. The RDDP will collect data such as; cost per class, cost per student, materials required to run the

program, hours of travel, miles traveled, and mobile prop use. We will use this data to measure the program’s success and cost of delivering training across the state in comparison to previous years.

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of a current program or service
 This request adds two DSFM FTEs to the RDDP, increasing the total staffing to three. The historical expenditures of the program are as follows:

RDDP Expenditure	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
A – Salaries	\$42,005	\$80,523	\$91,660	\$101,490
B – Benefits	\$16,448	\$27,181	\$30,832	\$29,696
C – Professional Service Contracts	\$22,363	\$69,188	\$2,360	\$90,428
E – Goods & Services	\$2,943	\$10,786	\$14,645	\$11,631
G – Travel	\$809	\$668	\$361	\$2,926
J – Capital Outlays	\$2,000	\$3,147	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$86,568	\$191,493	\$139,858	\$236,171

Detailed assumptions and calculations

See Attachment 1: Budget Estimator.

Workforce assumptions

Cost estimate is based on two DSFMs based on the job class salary at Step L as of July 1, 2022. Benefits are based on current fiscal year 2023 rates. Expected one-time costs of \$88,000 include vehicles, workstations, computers and software, and phones for each FTE.

Estimates for goods and services, equipment, and travel are based on our agency rule-of-thumb costs per FTE, which are derived from historical expenditures and adjusted for unit specific costs. Estimates for contract instructors and consumable training supplies are based on past averages for the RDDP.

We base our estimate for agency indirect costs (Object T) on the approved federal indirect cost rate of 31.88%. We apply this indirect cost rate percentage to all categories of expenditures with only two exceptions: capital equipment and the portion of each professional contract in excess of \$25,000. Indirect costs include, but are not limited to, computer and telecommunications support, payroll processing, vendor payments, general accounting, procurement administration, inventory control, and human resource management.

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic framework

Governor’s Results Washington Goals

GOAL: Healthy and Safe Communities

GOAL: Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government

Washington State Patrol 2022-2024 Strategic Plan Outcomes

OUTCOME TO ACHIEVE: Effective Disaster Response

Long-term objectives:

We want to develop fire, law enforcement, and emergency management community partnerships ... So that we can enhance and expand incident management and response capabilities.

Equity Impacts

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

The primary mission of the Washington State Patrol Fire Training Academy is to provide basic firefighter training to underserved fire agencies throughout the state. Volunteer agencies are the top priority and will greatly benefit from separating these two programs and adding two DSFMs to the RDDP.

Target Populations or Communities

Which target populations or communities benefits from this proposal? How will the population/community benefit? Include the demographic and geographic communities.

The primary mission of the Washington State Patrol Fire Training Academy is to provide basic firefighter training to underserved fire agencies throughout the state. We anticipate that all communities will benefit from this proposal, but volunteer agencies are the top priority and will greatly benefit from separating the BFFRP and RDDP programs, and adding two DSFMs to the RDDP.

Community Outreach and Engagement

Describe how your agency conducted community outreach and engagement by relationally partnering with communities and populations who have historically been excluded and marginalized by governmental budget decisions. How did your agency revise this proposal based upon the feedback provided through your community outreach and engagement?

We are actively involved in community outreach efforts through our Government and Media Relations (GMR) division as part of this request and our requested language revisions to RCW 43.43.934 – Concerning the director of fire protection, and RCW 43.43.944 – Concerning the fire service training account.

Disproportional Impact Considerations

Which target populations or communities are not included, would be marginalized, or disproportionately impacted by this proposal? Explain why and how these equity impacts will be addressed.

We do not expect any communities to be marginalized or disproportionately impacted by this proposal.

Other Collateral Connections

Intergovernmental

This proposal provides support to all tribal, regional, county, and city governments in the state by ensuring that all fire service personnel are able to receive needed training. There are no anticipated negative impacts to any group.

Stakeholder impacts

This proposal benefits all citizens of the state through improved training for fire service personnel. There is no expected opposition.

Legal or administrative mandates

N/A

Appendix D: SFMO cost estimates for Recommendations D, F, G, and H

Table 9: Cost estimates for Recommendation D: DSFM Wage Parity Reclassification (2023-2025)

Cost area	SFY 2024	SFY 2025	2023-25 biennium	Subsequent biennia
Salaries	\$0	\$594,468	\$594,468	\$1,188,936
Benefits	\$0	\$102,210	\$102,210	\$204,420
Total	\$0	\$696,678	\$696,678	\$1,393,356

Table 10: Cost estimates for Recommendation F: fund the SFMO's training programs (2023-25)

Cost area	New FTEs	SFY 2024	SFY 2025
Regional Direct Delivery	2	\$419,857	\$373,265
Fire Training Academy	22	\$3,713,195	\$3,642,707
Apprenticeship	Not applicable ²⁴	\$2,285,000	\$2,285,000
Total	24	\$6,418,052	\$6,300,972

Table 11: Cost estimates for Recommendation H: establish a Fire Investigation Division (2023-25)

Cost area	SFY 2024	SFY 2025	2023-25 biennium	Subsequent biennia
FTE	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0
A - Salaries	\$879,936	\$906,372	\$1,786,308	\$1,812,744
B - Benefits	\$231,783	\$295,907	\$527,690	\$591,813
C - Contracts	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
E - Goods/Services	\$164,617	\$129,265	\$293,881	\$258,529
G - Travel	\$21,600	\$21,600	\$43,200	\$43,200
J - Equipment	\$276,780	\$51,621	\$328,401	\$103,242
T - Indirect Costs	\$437,249	\$455,693	\$892,942	\$911,387
Total	\$2,011,964	\$1,860,457	\$3,872,422	\$3,720,915

²⁴ The Fire Fighter Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee provides local fire departments with financial support for the cost of firefighter apprenticeship trainings. The three year program includes on-the-job training in conjunction with technical instruction which meets National Fire Protection Association standards, is accredited, and provides college-level credit.

Table 12: Cost estimates for Recommendation G: hire six additional Mobilization staff (2023-25)

Cost area	SFY 2024	SFY 2025	2023-25 biennium	Subsequent biennia
FTE	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
A - Salaries	\$513,276	\$528,696	\$1,041,972	\$1,057,392
B - Benefits	\$146,829	\$184,647	\$331,475	\$369,293
C - Contracts	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
E - Goods/Services	\$57,192	\$36,024	\$93,216	\$72,048
G - Travel	\$14,400	\$14,400	\$28,800	\$28,800
J - Equipment	\$167,760	\$31,062	\$198,822	\$62,124
T - Indirect Costs	\$246,865	\$257,580	\$504,445	\$515,160
Total	\$1,146,322	\$1,052,408	\$2,198,730	\$2,104,817

Appendix E: Fire Insurance Premium Tax distributions, 2014-2023

Fund Code	Amount	Statute Distribution Percentages	Notes
	\$17,707,938	2014 total distributed	
086	\$3,541,587	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$7,083,175	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$4,426,984	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$2,656,190	15%	General Budget
	\$17,506,438	2015 total distributed	
086	\$3,501,287	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$7,002,575	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$4,376,609	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$2,625,965	15%	General Budget
	\$18,086,662	2016 total distributed	
086	\$3,617,332	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$7,234,664	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$4,521,665	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$2,712,998	15%	General Budget
	\$18,613,790	2017 total distributed	
086	\$3,722,757	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$7,445,515	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$4,653,447	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$2,792,068	15%	General Budget
	\$19,317,392	2018 total distributed	
086	\$3,863,478	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$7,726,956	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$4,829,347	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$2,897,608	15%	General Budget
	\$20,368,738	2019 total distributed	
086	\$4,073,747	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$8,147,495	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$5,092,184	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$3,055,311	15%	General Budget
	\$21,740,819	2020 total distributed	
086	\$4,348,163	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$8,696,327	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$10,870,409	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds

Fund Code	Amount	Statute Distribution Percentages	Notes
001	(\$2,174,081)	15%	General Budget
	\$22,660,948	2021 total distributed	
086	\$4,532,189	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$9,064,379	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$5,665,236	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$3,399,142	15%	General Budget
	\$24,361,984	2022 total distributed	
086	\$4,872,396	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$9,744,793	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$6,090,496	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$3,654,297	15%	General Budget
	\$26,755,650	2023 total distributed	
086	\$5,351,129	20%	Fire Service Training Account
204	\$10,702,259	40%	Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Administrative Account
190	\$6,688,912	25%	Cities, Towns, Fire Districts for Local Pension Funds
001	\$4,013,347	15%	General Budget