

WAYS AND MEANS & SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEES

Tax Relief

[Governor's FY19-20 Executive Budget](#) places an immediate and full retirement income tax exemption for military veterans and first responders, including retired state and federal law enforcement, firefighters and peace officers, representing \$20,742,570 in relief the first year. **Ways and Means adopted to fund \$20 million to exempt from income taxes the retirement income of military veterans and first responders, saving the average first responder and military veteran \$350 each year.**

[S.173](#) by Hembree provides tax deductions for military and first responders.

[Governor's FY19-20 Executive Budget](#) states that surpluses in state government revenues do not mean we have to spend it all; a surplus means prioritizing the most critical needs in state government and returning whatever we can back to the taxpayers. This year, the State of South Carolina had \$988,890,280 in surplus revenue. After putting dollars toward needed priorities, \$200 million remains in this budget. The Department of Revenue will issue a rebate to all residents of South Carolina who filed an SC1040 – 2018 Individual Income Tax Return on or before October 15, 2019. The amount of the rebate for each individual taxpayer, regardless of filing status, will be based on the number of residents that filed a 2018 Individual Income Tax Return. The Department of Revenue will issue all rebates no later than December 15, 2019, on a basis proportional to the amount paid.

[S461](#) by Sen(s) Sheheen and Gambrell increases the deduction for certain firefighters, law enforcement officials and members of the State Guard from \$3,000 - \$6,000.

Urban Search and Rescue (US&R)

[Governor's FY19-20 Executive Budget](#) places \$1 million for the Office of State Fire Marshal – Emergency Response Task Force – Urban Search and Rescue SC Task Force I (US&R SC-TF1) initiative. These funds will be used to purchase equipment and supplies from current state-approved contractors. Emergency Response Task Force responds to natural and man-made disasters by providing search and rescue, medical support, damage assessment and assistance in the coordination of relief. SC-TF1 is a search and rescue team that provides a coordinated response to disasters, particularly in urban environments. Emphasizing location and extraction of victims trapped in largely populated areas, the SC-TF1 is capable of responding to state and national disasters, including floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, widespread tornadoes and man-made technology and terrorist events. In order to succeed in its stated mission, SC-TF1 should have needed equipment and supplies that are ready for deployment at a moment's notice. The Emergency Response Task Force Division recently completed a comprehensive inventory of all of its equipment. Through this inventory process, it has identified equipment that needs replacement or updating, as well as equipment that is missing to better fulfill the capabilities of the task force. This equipment includes swift water and flood rescue equipment, medical equipment, wide area search and rescue equipment and equipment that will support the incident support team functions of the task force. If this equipment or supplies are not funded, SC-TF1's ability to respond during an emergency situation could be diminished resulting in harm to the public. **No funding was provided for US&R by the Ways and Means Committee.**

[Governor's FY19-20 Executive Budget](#) places 1 FTE for an Incident Support Team manager. One (1.00) FTE is for the State Fire Marshal's Office to serve as an Incident Support Team Manager for the Emergency Response Task Force Division. This position will lead the command and control operations to manage the operational, logistical, informational, planning and safety issues associated with complex incidents requiring firefighting and search and rescue resources. This position would manage the response of in-state and out-of-state resources to state emergencies. **FTE was provided by Ways and Means Committee**

PTSD

[Proviso 62.23](#) located in the Budget Bill directs that of the funds appropriated, one half shall go to Law Enforcement Assistance Program (SCLEAP) and the other half to SC Firefighter Assistance Support Team (FAST) to purchase insurance policies to pay out of pocket expenses for law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical service personnel when receiving treatment for PTSD. Funds may also be used to provide prevention and response initiatives to and for law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency medical service personnel. The program was created by the General Assembly in FY16-17 with nonrecurring funding of \$500,000. We are seeking \$500,000 in the FY19-20 Budget. **SKA met with Ways and Means Staff regarding funding Proviso at \$500,000. No funding was provided by the Ways and Means Committee.**

[S.326](#) is a Joint Resolution authored by Senator Massey that authorizes SLED to distribute \$250,000 to the SC State Firefighters Association to provide PTSD insurance and programs. S.326 has passed through the Senate and is currently in the House Ways and Means Committee. **SKA met with Ways and Means Staff. Staff recommended that S.326 be recalled from committee.**

Volunteer Firefighters Health Care

Proviso 108.1 as amended in the House Ways and Means Proviso Subcommittee includes volunteer firefighters and their dependents to purchase healthcare coverage through the state (PEBA). The volunteer would be required to cover all premium costs determined by PEBA. **The proviso was adopted by the full Ways and Means Committee.**

108.1 (PEBA: Lottery, Infrastructure Bank, and Magistrates Health Insurance) South Carolina Lottery Commissioners and South Carolina Transportation Infrastructure Bank Board members and their eligible dependents, and active volunteer firefighters, and their dependents, who are eligible for the income tax deduction pursuant to Section 12-6-1140 of the 1976 Code, are eligible to participate in the State Health and Dental Insurance Plan, upon paying the full premium costs as determined by the Public Employee Benefit Authority. If a county is participating in the State Health and Dental Insurance Plan, magistrates and their eligible dependents are eligible to participate in the State Health and Dental Insurance Plan, upon the magistrate paying the full premium costs as determined by the Public Employee Benefit Authority.

Pal800 Radio Funds Request

First responders (state and local law enforcement, fire services, emergency medical services, etc) need your help in supporting passage and increased funding of proviso 93.18 located in the Department of Administration's Section of the Budget bill. The proviso was placed in the budget years ago and the funding has been eroded over time. Cuts to this line item over the years have had a direct negative impact on the ability for many agencies to continue to use the statewide interoperable radio system Palmetto800. The safety of our citizens must be all governments' first priority. Current funding for the statewide radio proviso is \$1.2 million. In FY07-08 it was \$5 million which represented a match of \$1 dollar for every \$3 dollars spent for interoperability by state and local responders. Today, the match is approximately 5 cents on the dollar spent. State and local agencies are turning off their radios because of the lack of funding. The radio is a lifeline for many of our smaller communities. We are requesting an additional \$7.8 million to bring us back to the \$1 dollar match for every \$3 spent. **No additional funding was appropriated by the Ways and Means Committee for the initiative.**

Return to Work

By proviso passed in FY18-19 budget - retirees returning to work to be an SRO are not subject to a salary cap if they retired prior to December 31, 2017. Currently there are several bills have been filed allowing retirees to return to work without a salary cap ([S.256](#) (educators and PORS members), [H.3184](#) (educators only), [H.3185](#) (PORS members only), [H.3191](#) (SROs only), [H3620](#). (doesn't cost system because member must be retired by January 2, 2019)

LABOR, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEES

Omnibus Fire Bill

[S3178](#) by Ridgeway and [S.481](#) by Alexander are both Omnibus Fire bills whereby changes to sections of law dealing with the State Fire Marshal's Office and the duties and responsibilities of the office.

Ad Hoc Committee on Fire Services

This [special committee](#) is chaired by Senator Gambrell. The meeting was held on Tuesday 29, 2019 whereby it was discussed that all funds outlined in 38-7-20 (2) be used to fund the V-SAFE program pursuant to Section 23-9-25. **A bill is being prepared by staff for the committee.**

Building Codes

February 19, 2019: A meeting with Sen(s) Leatherman and Alexander was held on Tuesday, February 19, 2019 to discuss legislation regarding implementing a SC building code, increasing the code cycle, etc. Senator Leatherman encouraged the stakeholders to reach a compromise. The Senator had keen interest in a 5-year code cycle.

EDUCATION COMMITTEES

School Safety - Fire Drills

[S.239](#) by Fanning. This bill amends Section 59-63-910 whereby all public schools and Charter Schools shall conduct one fire drill, one active shooter/intruder drill and one severe weather/earthquake drill per semester. **Current law states that schools must conduct drills at least twice a year which allows schools the option, if they deem it necessary, to conduct more than one of each per semester.**

JUDICIARY COMMITTEES

Criminal History Background Checks

[S.274](#) by Senn. This bill amends Section 23-3-130 by authorizing SLED to provide free criminal history background checks to the legal representatives of a state law enforcement agency. **Request: Add that the State Fire Marshal receive free background checks when using the check for public safety purposes.**

Explosive Control Act - Sentencing Reform

[H.3322](#) by Pitts, Rutherford, et.al, - Among other statutory changes removing mandatory minimums, the bill amends the Explosive Control Act to remove the mandatory minimums. For example, the one year mandatory minimum relating to obstruction is removed from Section [16-23-740](#), the one year mandatory minimum for first offense and the five year mandatory minimum for second offense regarding providing false information to law enforcement were both removed in Section [16-23-750](#). The mandatory prison time was removed regarding mandatory installation of Fire Alarm boxes in Schools and Hospitals. **The bill was discussed in subcommittee this week; however, was carried over and scheduled to be discussed in the Criminal Laws Subcommittee, Wednesday, February 27, 2019 @ 9am in Room 516 of the Blatt Building.**

Assaulting a law enforcement officer, first responder or corrections officer ABHAN

[H.3078](#) adds that assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature occurs when a person injures a federal, state, or local law enforcement officer or corrections officer, a firefighter or an emergency medical services worker in the discharge of or because of their official duties.

[S.0499](#) ([S.319](#), [H.3847](#)) adds that assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature occurs when a person injures a health care professional which includes but not limited to a firefighter and an emergency medical services worker in the discharge of or because of their official duties.