

Budget Activity

[House Budget Schedule](#) – The House of Representatives is scheduled to deliberate the FY21-22 Budget, March 22 – March 24, 2021.

Ways and Means FY21-22 Budget Includes:

- **Proviso (81.fr)** directs the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation distribute funds to the South Carolina Firefighter Assistance Support Team (FAST) to reimburse firefighters and emergency medical technicians who incur mental injury as a result of a critical incident during the scope of employment. \$250,000 is recommended to cover these out of pocket costs along with other operating expenses. The Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation requested recurring funds for the PTSD initiative from the Ways and Means Transportation and Regulatory Budget Subcommittee which is comprised of Rep. Shannon Erickson (Ch.), Rep. Craig Gagnon and Rep. Mark Willis. During the Subcommittee meeting on January 27, 2021, the PTSD proviso was adopted. *[The proviso and \\$250,000 \(recurring\) was adopted by the full Ways and Means Committee.](#)*
- **Proviso (108.rwe)** directs that for Fiscal Year 2021-22, the earnings limitation does not apply to retired SCRS or PORS members who return to covered employment to participate in the state's public health preparedness and response to COVID-19. *[This proviso was adopted by the full Ways and Means Committee.](#)*
- **Urban Search and Rescue (US&R)** - The Committee recommends \$850,000 in one-time funding to purchase equipment for the Emergency Response Task Force. 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. *[\\$850,000 \(nonrecurring\) for equipment for the Emergency Response Task Force has been adopted by the full Ways and Means Committee.](#)*
- **Firefighter Cancer Health Care Benefit Plan** – The Committee recommends fully funding the Cancer Benefit Plan. The Firefighter Cancer Health Care Benefit Plan signed into law 9/28/20 by Governor McMaster is a supplemental insurance policy available to volunteer and career firefighters. The law states that upon a diagnosis of cancer, a firefighter is entitled to benefits, if a firefighter is a resident of South Carolina and has been in a South Carolina Fire Department for at least five continuous years and within ten years of last date of active service. Upon medical diagnosis, a firefighter is reimbursed up to \$12,000 annually for any out-of-pocket medical expenses to include but not limited to; deductibles, copayments, or coinsurances costs incurred. An additional benefit of \$20,000 is provided upon a diagnosis as defined and not to exceed one benefit payment per calendar year. In the case of death, as a result of the cancer or circumstances, a \$75,000

death benefit is provided. The funding component located in the Cancer Benefit bill was removed from the bill due to uncertain revenues associated with the pandemic. The fire service requested funding for the Cancer B2enefit Plan be reinstated. *The Committee adopted \$3,784,000 (recurring) for the Firefighter Cancer Health Care Benefit Plan.*

Legislative Activity

H. 3134 — Removes the \$10,000 earnings limitation cap for a retired employee under the State Retirement System and the Police Officers Retirement System that returns to work at an agency covered under PEBA. They must first be separated from employment in either system for a period of 12 consecutive months. *SCSFA's legislative agent testified requesting that the legislature consider a reduction to the 12-month employment separation period. H.3134 passed out of a House Subcommittee. The bill is awaiting a Ways and Means Committee hearing.*

H. 3106 — Provides that an employer, up to certain limits, may elect to pay all or a portion of required employee contributions during a fiscal year under the South Carolina Retirement System and the Police Officers Retirement System, respectively. *H.3106 passed out of a House Subcommittee. The bill is awaiting a Ways and Means Committee hearing.*

H.3193 — Creation and Boundaries of the South Lynches Fire District - Revises the boundaries of the South Lynches Fire District to include the area within the municipal limits of the Town of Scranton in Florence County. *H.3193 was reported out favorably from the Military, Local Government, and Public Affairs Subcommittee Hearing on February 11, 2021. Full 3-M meeting reported the bill out favorably. The bill is on the House Floor.*

H.3466 — Provides procedures through which a fire department that assumes the cost of training a firefighter may be reimbursed for these costs by other fire departments that subsequently hire the firefighter within a certain period of time. *H.3466 was reported out favorably from the Military, Local Government, and Public Affairs subcommittee hearing on February 11, 2021 and taken up by the Full 3-M Committee Wednesday, February 24, 2021. Full 3-M meeting reported the bill out favorably. The bill is on the House Floor.*

S.94 Eliminates the requirement that emergency responders establish that “extraordinary and unusual” conditions occurred in order for PTSD to be covered as a compensable workers’ compensation injury for emergency responders. Under South Carolina workers’ compensation insurance program, a worker who has suffered job-related injuries is supposed to be able to obtain payments to cover all medical expenses and long-term benefits for a permanent disability, as well as a portion of lost earnings. However, [South Carolina's current workers’ compensation law](#) says that for stress, mental injuries and mental illness suffered due to job conditions “unaccompanied by physical injury” to warrant medical benefits, the conditions that caused the injury must be shown to have been “extraordinary and unusual in comparison to the normal conditions of the particular employment.” *The bill was amended in subcommittee.* The amendment mirrors Florida and Connecticut statutes.

The new bill language - Exempts first responders from having to establish by a preponderance of the evidence that stress, mental injury, or mental illness diagnosed as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) arising from a “significant traumatic experience” in the course of employment stems from conditions that are extraordinary or unusual relative to the normal conditions of employment for purposes of collecting workers’ compensation. Defines “first responders” as law enforcement officers and firefighters, including volunteers. Defines “significant traumatic experience”. Defines “grievous bodily harm” as seriously bodily injury including fractured or dislocated bones, deep cuts, torn members of the body, serious damages to internal organs, and other severe bodily injuries. *S.94, as amended, will be on the next full Senate Judiciary Committee agenda on March 9, 2021 at 3pm in room 105 Gressette.*

Senate Bills Regarding Matters Associated with the Fire Service in South Carolina

Senate Weekly Meetings

- [S. 94](#) — (PTSD) Provides that a limitation on stress, mental injuries, and mental illness for Workers' Compensation claims does not apply to a first responder diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.
- [S. 149](#) — Provides that current volunteer firefighters are eligible for ad valorem tax exemption on property they own.
- [S. 176](#) — Establishes the "South Carolina Shared-Risk Defined Benefit Plan".
- [S. 194](#) — Allows a South Carolina income tax deduction of all military retirement income and first responder retirement income.
- [S. 196](#) — Revises the definition of the term "fireworks prohibited zone" to include any public beach or public beach access designated and posted by a local governing body.
- [S. 234](#) — Provides that an employer, under the South Carolina Retirement System and the Police Officers Retirement System respectively, may elect to pay all or a portion of required employee contributions during a fiscal year up to certain limits.
- [S. 282](#) — Provides that a limitation on stress, mental injuries, and mental illness for workers' compensation claims does not apply to a first responder diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.
- [S.327](#) – Provides that each semester all public schools including charter schools whose instruction is not primarily delivered online, shall conduct one fire drill, one active shooter/intruder drill and one severe weather/earthquake drill. This changes current law which allows for *at least two* of these drills per year.
- [S. 328](#) — Deletes the earnings limitation relating to the amount of compensation that may be earned upon returning to covered employment under the Police Officers Retirement System.
- [S. 345](#) — Directs the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation to promulgate certain emergency regulations to establish a mandatory, temporary standard for employers to control, prevent, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 to and among employees and employers.
- [S. 361](#) — Relates to the amount of compensation that may be earned upon returning to covered employment under the South Carolina Retirement System and the Police Officers Retirement System, respectively.
- [S. 401](#) — Allows the governing body of a county to suspend the limitation for millage increases for the purpose of supporting a fire protection district.
- [S. 402](#) — Provides that a limitation on stress, mental injuries, and mental illness for Workers' Compensation claims does not apply to a first responder diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.
- [S. 460](#) — Revises the duties of resident fire marshals, and who may exercise these duties. Deletes antiquated language and provides for technical changes.
- [S. 603](#) — Amends provisions pertaining to hazardous waste cleanup by providing standards for certain cleanup, removal, remediation, and other responses.

House Bills Regarding Matters Associated with the Fire Service in South Carolina

House of Representatives Weekly Meetings

- [H. 3032](#) — Increases the amount that may be earned without affecting the monthly retirement allowance from \$10,000 to \$50,000 for covered employees in the South Carolina Retirement System and the South Carolina Police Officers Retirement System, respectively.
- [H. 3038](#) — Provides that it is unlawful for a law enforcement officer or paramedic to inject ketamine into a criminal suspect as a means to incapacitate him.
- [H. 3106](#) — Provides that an employer, up to certain limits, may elect to pay all or a portion of required employee contributions during a fiscal year under the South Carolina Retirement System and the Police Officers Retirement System, respectively.
- [H. 3134](#) — Provides that if a participating employer in the South Carolina Retirement System or the Police Officers Retirement System, respectively, engages a certain member of the system to perform services, then the participant employer shall pay to the system the employer contribution that would be required if the member received the

compensation as an active contributing member of the system.

[H. 3165](#) — Creates the "Fallen First Responder Survivor Advocate" position within the Department of Administration.

[H. 3192](#) — Establishes a presumption that a first responder, health care provider, or correctional officer contracting COVID-19 is entitled to Workers' Compensation benefits as an occupational disease.

[H.3193](#) — **Creation and Boundaries of the South Lynches Fire District - Revises the boundaries of the South Lynches Fire District to include the area within the municipal limits of the Town of Scranton in Florence County.**

[H. 3252](#) — Simplifies the definition of fire departments and the projects on which grant funds may be expended in the VSAFE program.

[H. 3292](#) — 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 (EMS) worker in the discharge of or because of their official duties.

[H. 3329](#) — (Joint Resolution) Provides for an exemption for close-contact service providers who were required to close by executive order of the Governor due to the COVID-19 pandemic from license renewal fee requirements and continuing education requirements until one year after they are allowed to return to work by the Governor has lapsed.

[H. 3349](#) — Allows a South Carolina income tax deduction of all military retirement income and first responder retirement income.

[H. 3380](#) — Provides a deduction for any income attributable to a person who served as a volunteer first responder during the tax year.

[H. 3466](#) — Provides procedures through which a fire department that assumes the cost of training a firefighter may be reimbursed for these costs by other fire departments that subsequently hire the firefighter within a certain period of time.

[H. 3491](#) — Enacts the "Citizen and Taxpayer Protection Act". This bill includes enhanced penalties for assault on first responder.

[H. 3541](#) — Provides that the regulation of fires by the state forester does not apply to fires used for the preparation of food or fires used in appropriate enclosures.

[H. 3557](#) — Revises the earning limitation upon return to covered employment in the South Carolina Retirement System (SCRS) and Police Officers Retirement System (PORS). Increases the amount that may be earned without affecting the monthly retirement allowance from \$10,000 to \$65,000 for covered employment in the SCRS and PORS.

[H.3595](#) — Revises provisions of the South Carolina Retirement System and the South Carolina Police Officers Retirement System to provide that a retired member may be hired and return to employment covered by any system provided for by law, without regard to earnings, without affecting the monthly retirement allowance the member is receiving from the system if the member has not been engaged to perform services for a participating employer in any system provided for by law for compensation in any capacity, whether as an employee, independent contractor, leased employee, joint employee, or other classification of worker, for a period of at least twelve consecutive months subsequent to retirement.

[H. 3791](#) – Enacts the Police and Communities Trust (PACT) legislation. This bill includes many components for law enforcement; and provides an exemption to current law allowing that the millage rate limitation may be suspended and the millage rate may be increased to purchase equipment and make expenditures to improve response by law enforcement, fire rescue, and emergency medical services. Expenditures may include salaries and benefits.

[H. 3838](#) — Requires the Department of Health and Environmental Control to identify certified teachers, school support staff, and first responders as mission critical workers and individuals who are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination under Phase IA of the COVID-19 vaccination plan.

[H. 3939](#) — Eliminates the requirement that emergency responders establish that “extraordinary and unusual” conditions occurred in order for PTSD to be covered as a compensable workers’ compensation injury for emergency responders during the use of deadly force in the line of duty.