GOVERNOR'S VETO
AB 1309 (Flora)
As Enrolled September 8, 2025
2/3 vote

SUMMARY

Requires comparative pay for rank-and-file state Bargaining Unit (BU) 8 firefighters employed by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) similar to those of other California fire departments, as specified, and among other provisions.

1) Toward recruiting and retaining the highest qualified and skilled firefighters for CAL FIRE, requires the state to pay rank-and-file state BU 8 firefighters within 15% of the average salary for corresponding ranks in the following 20 California fire departments, as agreed to by state BU 8 and the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) in 2017:

   a) The cities of Bakersfield, Chula Vista, Corona, Escondido, Fullerton, Hayward, Milpitas, Ontario, Oxnard, Rialto, Roseville, San Bernardino, San Mateo, Santa Monica, Stockton, Torrance, and Ventura;

   b) The Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department;

   c) The Novato Fire District; and,

   d) The County of Los Angeles.

2) Require the state and the state BU 8 exclusive representative to jointly survey annually and calculate the estimated average salaries of the immediately aforementioned departments based on the projected average total salary for those departments as of July 1 of the year in which the survey is conducted.

3) Require, on or before January 1, 2027, the CalHR to conduct and report to the CAL FIRE a cursory survey on the salaries and benefits for the prior year of each of the fire chiefs for the following fire departments:

   a) The cities of Fresno and San Diego.

   b) The counties of Los Angeles and San Bernardino.

   c) The City and County of San Francisco.

4) Establish that it is the policy of the state to consider the salary of corresponding ranks within the comparable jurisdiction, as specified, as well as other factors, including internal comparisons, when determining compensation for CAL FIRE's uniformed classifications.

5) Provide that any increase in salary for BU 8 firefighters, as specified, resulting from these provisions must be implemented through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) pursuant to the Ralph C. Dills Act (Dills Act), and establish that if these provisions are in conflict with those in a MOU, the MOU must be controlling without further legislative action, except if the MOU requires the expenditure of funds, then the provision must not become effective

unless approved by the Legislature and the Annual Budget Act. Include uncodified legislative findings and declarations for these purposes.

Governor's Veto Message
"While I appreciate the author's intent, this bill would create significant cost pressures for the state and circumvent the collective bargaining process. State employee salaries, along with other components of compensation such as health and pension benefits, should be determined through collective bargaining. Establishing a statutory floor for employees of a single department undermines this process, to the detriment of both the state and other bargaining units."

COMMENTS

State BU 8 (Firefighters) MOU Fiscal Analysis by the Legislative Analyst's Office

On August 6, 2024, the administration submitted a proposed MOU between the state and state BU 8 to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) for review.

While the MOU, which is effective from July 1, 2024, though June 30, 2026, included provisions relating to the reduction of the duty week, among other things, provisions relating to pay include: 1) 2024-25 special salary adjustment (8.5%) to most of the BU, but not specialty classes; 2) a 2.5% general salary increase that increases the base pay for all steps in each classification's pay range; 3) a 2025-26 firefighter special salary adjustment (4.25%) for the firefighter I and fire lookout classifications; 4) a pay differential of 5% of base salary for a) CAL FIRE peace officers assigned to certain designated peace officers, b) peace officers appointed under Section 8302 (g) of the Penal Code and remain in good standing receive pay differential of 2.5% of base pay, and c) CAL FIRE peace officers who serve as a field training officer and assigned a trainee would receive a $250 weekly stipend for each week a trainee is assigned; 5) specified classifications depending on their helicopter (helo) pilot qualifications and/or CAL FIRE helo program responsibilities receive qualification incentive payments established as a percentage of base pay ranging from 2.5% to 10% of pay, among other specified provisions; 6) $50 to employees who are not in a designated paramedic position, but maintain an emergency medical technician-paramedic license in good standing for each day they work voluntary overtime behind a paramedic position vacancy; and, fire mission pay where CAL FIRE is changing its overall staffing model from ramping up and down based on fire season, to one where it maintains base-level staffing during certain months of the year with no transition period. This fire mission pay is provided during peak staffing periods, increasing the amount of time that eligible employees receive the pay.

The analysis of the LAO further notes that, the compensation study required under existing law compares employer cost for salary, cash benefits, and health and retirement benefits, among others, and compares the state with 20 fire departments across California, and noted that "state firefighter compensation [is] found to lag local fire department compensation," where a 2023 compensation survey found that the lag rests between 11 percent to 29 percent, depending on the classification. However, the survey does not compare federal firefighters.

Please see the various policy committee analyses for a full discussion of this bill.

According to the Author
"In an effort to pay CAL FIRE firefighters a more reasonable and competitive wage, this bill seeks to bring [parity] and appropriate compensation for state firefighters."

Arguments in Support
Among other things, the CAL FIRE, Local 2881 states that, "[this bill] codifies an agreement regarding the protocol of comparative pay that was reached between state BU 8 and the CalHR in 2017.

"Devastating wildfires have become a regular occurrence in California, exacerbated by a changing climate and years of dry conditions. Large scale incidents such as the Dixie Fire, the Camp Fire, and the Eaton and Palisades Fires have strained not only the resources of fire departments to the limit, but placed unimaginable burdens onto the firefighters employed by CAL FIRE who are on the front lines of many of these blazes. Deployments during wildfire season, which now can stretch through the entire year, can extend up to and over 60 days in a row, with exhausting 48-hour shifts lined up back-to-back with little to no opportunities for rest. And even when they are not on the forefront of pushing back against mega-fires that threaten entire communities, CAL FIRE firefighters work daily to protect their communities and the entire state with every ounce of dedication and skill employed by their peers in other departments. For years however, the wages for CAL FIRE have lagged significantly behind what is offered in municipal and county departments, devaluing the critical work done by these professionals and making it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain firefighters where they are desperately needed. Short staffing only compounds the dangers inherent to this work through exhaustion and critical stress, but also presents long-term health impacts from extended exposure to toxic smoke with no respiratory protection as well as the negative repercussions for behavioral health from lack of sleep, overwork, and months on end spent away from family. In order to retain the skilled and trained firefighters that are so desperately needed at safe levels it is imperative. [This bill] will ensure that the full-time professional firefighters of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection are paid a wage that is within 15 percent of the average salary of similar ranks averaged from 20 fire departments across California."

Arguments in Opposition
None.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, the CalHR indicates that this bill would result in first-year costs of $373 million to $609 ($246 million to $401 million General Fund), and between $28 million to $115 million ($18 million to $75 million General Fund) annually thereafter. The range of costs for initial implementation depend heavily on the results of a future salary survey, which would be the State's first opportunity to account for BU 8 wage increases related to the transition to a 66-hour work week. To the extent that wages for the local jurisdictions did not increase at the same pace as state wages, the bill's cost would likely be on the lower end of the range."

VOTES

ASM PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND RETIREMENT: 7-0-0
YES: McKinnor, Lackey, Alanis, Boerner, Elhawary, Garcia, Nguyen

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1
YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa
ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-1-1
YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
NO: DeMaio
ABS, ABST OR NV: Lee

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1
YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Reyes

UPDATED

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