

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2129 (Flora) – As Introduced February 18, 2026

Policy Committee: Public Employment and Retirement Vote: 6 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the state to pay State Bargaining Unit (BU) 8 firefighters within 15% of the average salary for corresponding ranks in certain local fire departments.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the state to pay rank-and-file BU 8 firefighters employed by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) within 15% of the average salary for corresponding ranks in 20 specified local fire departments.
- 2) Requires the state and BU 8 to annually jointly survey and calculate the estimated average salaries for those specified local fire departments.
- 3) Requires, by January 1, 2027, the Department of Human Resources (CalHR) to report to CAL FIRE a cursory survey of the prior-year salaries and benefits of each of the fire chiefs in five specified local fire departments.
- 4) Sets the policy of the state when determining compensation for CAL FIRE's uniformed classifications and requires a salary increase be implemented through a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

FISCAL EFFECT:

Costs between approximately \$373.4 million to \$609.1 million (\$245.6 million to \$400.7 million General Fund (GF)) in the first year of implementation, and between \$28 million to \$114.6 million (\$18.4 million to \$75.4 million GF) annually thereafter, to the state to increase BU 8 compensation. CalHR notes that the range of costs for initial implementation depends heavily on the results of the state's next salary survey, which will be the state's first opportunity to account for BU 8 wage increases related to the recent transition to a 66-hour work week. If the wages for local jurisdictions do not increase at the same pace as state wages, costs would likely be at the lower end of the range.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

This bill would create wage parity for CAL FIRE firefighters to support recruitment during increasingly severe statewide fire seasons. By aligning pay with other fire departments, the bill aims to improve hiring and retention and reduce the loss of firefighters to higher-paying jurisdictions, helping the CAL FIRE meet the state's public safety needs.

This bill is sponsored by CAL FIRE Local 2881.

- 2) **State Firefighter Compensation.** The current BU 8 MOU, which is effective from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2026, includes provisions relating to a reduction in the duty workweek from 72 hours to 66 hours to address concerns about firefighter welfare, a 2.5% general base pay salary increase, specified special salary adjustments for each of the two covered fiscal years, and other provisions related to pay. Existing law requires CalHR, when determining compensation for state firefighters, to take into consideration the compensation provided by jurisdictions employing 75 or more full-time firefighters who work in California. Regarding this survey, which compared the state with 20 fire departments across California, an analysis of the current MOU conducted by the Legislative Analyst's Office concluded:

The 2023 compensation survey found that state compensation for firefighters lags compensation provided to local fire department firefighters by between 11 percent to 29 percent, depending on the classification. The survey found that while both state and local firefighters work 24-hour shifts, state firefighters work more days of the year (156 days compared with 121 days for the local fire departments in the survey). The result is that state firefighters work more hours of scheduled overtime than local firefighters. Based solely on local government compensation levels and hours, the pay increases proposed in the agreement appear reasonable.

This bill requires the state to pay BU 8 firefighters within 15% of the average of the salary for corresponding ranks at 20 local fire departments, with the salary increase implemented through an MOU.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 1309 (Flora), of the current legislative session, was substantially similar to this bill. The Governor vetoed AB 1309 citing significant cost pressures and concern that it would circumvent the collective bargaining process.

AB 252 (Bains), of the current legislative session, requires CAL FIRE to maintain full staffing levels throughout the calendar year. AB 252 was held in this committee.

- 4) **Prior Legislation.** AB 1254 (Flora), of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, was substantively similar to this bill, except AB 1254 did not include this bill's fire chief survey. AB 1254 was ordered to the Senate Inactive File.

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