Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
SB 1444 (Committee on Labor, Public Employment and Retirement) – As Amended April 23, 2026

Policy Committee:	Insurance	Vote:	17 - 0
	Public Employment and Retirement		6 - 0

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

SUMMARY:

This bill extends the timeframe a California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) member has to change their designated beneficiary upon retirement and makes various changes to labor laws.

Specifically, this bill:

1) Extends the timeframe, from 30 days after the first payment of a retirement allowance to 60 days after such a payment, within which a CalPERS member has to make an election, revocation, or change of election regarding the member's designated beneficiary.

2) Requires a party to an employee's wage complaint filed with the Labor Commissioner (LC) to inform the LC of any changes to the party's email address, adds additional mail options and electronic service to the list of methods by which the LC may provide a wage claim notice, and requires a party represented by an attorney to accept electronic service.

3) Clarifies that an employee who is willfully misclassified as an independent contractor may directly recover civil penalties as damages payable to the employee, instead of only specifying the LC or a public prosecutor may recover such damages payable to the employee.

4) Repeals the requirement that a firefighter serving a commercial airport have Fire Control 5 certification by the State Fire Marshal (SFM) in order for an existing rebuttable presumption applicable to certain first responders' workers' compensation claims to apply.

5) Modifies reporting procedures of the Employment Development Department (EDD) regarding the School Employee Fund and EDD's automation plans.

FISCAL EFFECT:

1) Minor and absorbable costs to CalPERS to update informational materials and procedures regarding designated beneficiaries.

2) Potential minor cost savings to the LC by allowing the use of less costly mail notices, including requiring email for certain communications, during wage claim proceedings.

3) Potential minor cost savings to EDD by streamlining reporting requirements.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author, "This omnibus bill makes statutory updates to improve efficiency, clarify, and modernization across several state programs." This bill is supported by state retiree and supervisor groups and the California Professional Firefighters.

2) **Background.** ***CalPERS Beneficiary.*** A CalPERS member may provide a designated beneficiary a lifetime allowance upon the member's death by authorizing a reduction from the member's unmodified pension allowance. Existing law requires an election, revocation, or change of election regarding the designated beneficiary to be made within 30 days after the first payment of the member's retirement allowance or within 30 days after the first payment following a change in the member's retirement status. This bill extends both 30-day timeframes to 60 days, providing the member with additional time to make this decision of lifelong consequence before the selection becomes irrevocable.

   Employee Damages. According to the Senate Labor, Public Employment, and Retirement Committee's analysis of this bill, this bill corrects a drafting error identified by the LC to AB 594 (Maienschein, Chapter 659, Statutes of 2023), which authorized public prosecution of certain Labor Code violations. This bill ensures that an employee may continue to recover misclassification penalties as damages.

   Rebuttable Presumption. Existing law establishes industrial injury presumptions for certain first responders' workers' compensation claims, under which the specified injury is presumed to arise out of employment unless rebutted by the employer. A firefighter in California maintains such presumptions for cancer, post-traumatic stress disorder, tuberculosis, blood-borne infectious disease or certain staph bacteria infections, illness or death resulting from exposure to a biochemical substance, and meningitis. This bill repeals an outdated certification requirement that certain firefighters providing protection to a commercial airport must meet to qualify for the presumption.

   EDD Reports. EDD is responsible for administering the School Employee Fund, which finances unemployment claims filed by school employees. This bill consolidates two separate reports that EDD must publish regarding school employers' usage of the School Employee Fund to reduce duplication and requires EDD's biennial report on automation planning to cover a three-year, instead of a 10-year, planning horizon given the rate of emerging technological advancements.

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