

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 581 (McGuire) – As Amended April 10, 2025

Policy Committee:	Public Employment and Retirement	Vote:	7 - 0
	Natural Resources		13 - 0

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

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes the Fight for Firefighters Act of 2025 requiring the Department of Human Resources (CalHR), the State Personnel Board (SPB), and any other relevant state agency, to transition the Firefighter I (FFI) classification within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to a permanent position.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) One-time General fund costs of \$145 million, \$230 million, and \$330 million in each of the first three years of implementation, respectively, and \$439 million annually thereafter for CAL FIRE to eliminate approximately 2,969 Firefighter I personnel positions and transition them into permanent, full-time Firefighter II positions.
- 2) One-time General Fund costs of \$13.4 million in the first year of implementation, and \$12.5 million annually thereafter, for the California Conservation Corps to realign its fire crews to CAL FIRE's year-round operations schedule to support 72 staff and 47 Corps members.

COMMENTS:

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

California and the entire West are burning at historic rates. Eight of the most destructive wildfires in California history have hit over the past five years, with two of the deadliest wildfires burning over 16,000 structures in Los Angeles County just 13 days after Christmas. It is crystal clear, even with the state's historic investments in CAL FIRE—which doubled the number of CAL FIRE Firefighters in the last eight years—they need our help. The Golden State continues to face unprecedented challenges—wildfires burning longer, hotter, faster and more frequently than ever before. The new reality has set in and we're never going back. This bill would require the Department of Human Resources, the State Personnel Board, and any other relevant state agency to take the necessary actions to transition seasonal firefighters employed by CAL FIRE to a permanent firefighter employment classification.

- 2) **Background. CAL FIRE.** CAL FIRE oversees fire prevention and suppression for more than 31 million acres in California. CAL FIRE service needs primarily dictate its workweek, staffing, and operational model, which includes providing coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on a year-round basis, as well as augmented response capacity during peak wildfire season. CAL FIRE's firefighters, fire engines, and aircraft respond to more than 5,400 wildland fires that burn an average of 156,000 acres each year, and, according to CAL FIRE, "answer the call [of duty] more than 450,000 times for other emergencies each year."

Firefighter I. An entry-level seasonal position, the FFI requires basic training and skills for fire suppression, wildland firefighting, and hazardous materials response. Because the FFI is a temporary position, existing law prohibits incumbents from working more than nine months within any 12-consecutive-month period. While the seasonal nature of the FFI results in CAL FIRE losing experienced and trained firefighters every year at least three months, the nature of the position also allows for efficient recruitment during peak need. For example, during the Los Angeles fires of January 2025, CAL FIRE reports the FFI facilitated the hiring of approximately 1,000 firefighters within one week to address fire suppression needs. This bill would transition all existing FFI positions into full-time, permanent Firefighter II positions. Such a change would limit the hiring flexibility offered by the FFI position but would facilitate more rapid response to emergencies during typical non-peak seasons by maintaining higher staffing levels year-round.

- 3) **Related and Prior Legislation.** AB 102 (Gabriel), Chapter 5, Statutes of 2025, appropriated \$39 million for CAL FIRE to begin transitioning a portion of FFI positions to a permanent employment classification and included legislative intent to provide additional funding augmentations for this purpose beginning in fiscal year 2026-27.

AB 2538 (Grayson), of the 2024 Legislative Session, required CalHR, SPB, and any other relevant state agency to take actions to ensure CAL FIRE may employ seasonal firefighters in excess of the nine months limit within a consecutive 12-month period to address emergency fire conditions and staff shortages. The Governor vetoed the bill citing a significant increase in CAL FIRE's baseline staffing level and budget beyond year-round needs along with incompatibility with the California Constitution's prohibition of a person in a temporary position serving longer than nine months in a 12-month period.

Analysis Prepared by: Aaron Heredia / APPR. / (916) 319-2081