

SUBJECT: Workers' compensation for volunteer emergency medical personnel

COMMITTEE: Business and Industry — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Brimer, Brady, Corte, Crabb, Eiland, Giddings, Janek, Rhodes, Solomons
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None
Against — None
On — Laurie Crumpton, Legislative Oversight Committee on Workers' Compensation

DIGEST: HB 1144 would require political subdivisions that provide workers' compensation coverage for volunteer firefighters and volunteer police officers to provide coverage for volunteer emergency medical personnel. The bill would take effect September 1, 1995.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1144 would give equal workers' compensation protection to volunteer emergency personnel who face similar health and safety risks to those faced by volunteer firefighters and police officers. This bill would not mandate the coverage of volunteer personnel; it would only require the inclusion of emergency personnel in those workers' compensation plans that also include volunteer firefighters and police officers.

The impact on political subdivisions would most likely be minimal. Many political subdivisions already provide coverage for volunteer emergency personnel, and many emergency services volunteers are also volunteer firefighters. An estimated 3,000 volunteer emergency workers statewide would be affected by this bill. One workers' compensation expert estimates that it would only cost about \$18 per month per person to add EMS volunteers to an existing policy. Emergency workers should be included in coverage by those political subdivisions that can afford to cover volunteer firefighters and police officers.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1144 would limit local government's choices in providing workers' compensation coverage to volunteer public servants and raise out of reach the cost of workers' compensation coverage currently held by some volunteer firefighters and police officers.

The potential impact of HB 1144 is unclear; workers' compensation rates could be higher than \$18 per month per person depending upon the plan and the community. No one can accurately predict exactly how many volunteer emergency personnel would benefit from this bill.

Many counties and cities operate on tight budgets and may be unable to afford additional costs. HB 1144 could penalize the political subdivisions that do provide workers' compensation coverage to volunteer firefighters and police officers by requiring them to also cover emergency personnel.