

**Statewide Volunteer Firefighter Plan
Advisory Board Meeting Notes
September 15, 2020**

Members Present

- Steve Fenske, Townships Representative
- Rose Hennessy-Allen, State Auditor's Office
- Cal Larson, Cities Representative
- Mark Rosenblum, Volunteer Firefighters Representative
- Marc Volk, Volunteer Firefighters Representative
- Jay Wood, Volunteer Firefighters Representative

Staff Present

- Doug Anderson, PERA Executive Director
- David Andrews, PERA Staff
- Gladys Rodriguez, PERA Staff
- Amy Streng, PERA Staff

Others Present

- Chad Burkitt, LCPR
- Nyle Zikmund, Mounds View
- Maddison Zikmund, SBM
- Angie Huss, Locklaw, PLLP
- Ann Lenczewski, Locklaw, PLLP
- Kristie Strum, Dept. of Revenue

1. Meeting called to Order

Meeting was held remotely via telephone or video conference as permitted in Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.015. Anderson was present at the meeting location. Roll call was taken to establish attendance.

2. Approval of Meeting Notes from September 15, 2020

Larson moved approval of the September 15, 2020, SVFRP Advisory Board meeting notes. The motion was seconded by Wood and passed unanimously by roll call vote.

3. LCPR Proposal for Sharing Fire State Aid

LCPR staff has held meetings of a work group made up of firefighters and representatives of fire departments, municipalities, PERA, the Department of Revenue, and the Office of the State Auditor to discuss alternative approaches for sharing fire state aid when a municipality employs both volunteer firefighters and/or salaried firefighters. Currently, if a municipality with a combination fire department participates in the PERA SVF Plan to provide retirement benefits for its volunteer firefighters, the fire state aid distributed annually by the Minnesota Department of Revenue is permitted to be paid only to the SVF Plan for the municipality's volunteer firefighters.

Burkitt shared restrictions to the sharing of fire state aid between a municipality and its affiliated relief association under the 2020 law, and provided a summary of a proposal for sharing fire state aid.

The proposal consist of passing a new law to permit municipalities that participate in the SVF Plan to receive a portion of the annual fire state aid payment, up to a maximum amount that would be defined in the new law.

In order to split fire state aid between a department's career and volunteer firefighters, the following requirements must be met for any year in which fire state aid is split:

- The department must be a combination department; and
- The department's account in the SVF Plan must be at least 110% funded.

The amount of fire state aid allocated to a municipality cannot exceed the lowest amount of the following:

- The municipality's total employer contribution to the PERA P&F Plan in the previous calendar year;
- The amount of fire state aid, not including supplemental state aid to be paid on October 1; or
- The total fire state aid (FSA + supplemental) minus the municipality's required financial contribution to the SVF Plan for the upcoming calendar year (determined by PERA each August)

The decision to receive a portion of fire state aid can be made individually by the municipality unless the volunteer firefighters have a relief association. If the volunteer firefighters have a relief association, the legislation would require the municipality to obtain the consent of the volunteer firefighters, either through a vote of the firefighters conducted by the relief association or by entering into an aid allocation agreement negotiated with the relief association's board of trustees.

If a municipality has a relief association associated with it, the municipality cannot split fire state aid unless the relief association approves splitting fire state aid in one of the following ways:

- Method 1 -by vote: the relief association conducts a vote and a majority of the volunteer firefighters vote in favor of splitting the fire state aid.
- Method 2 -by agreement: the relief association and the municipality negotiate an agreement that satisfies the requirements of the aid allocation agreement for VFRA.

PERA duties:

- Annually calculate and report to the municipality the maximum amount of fire state aid available to be split.
- Transmit to the municipality the appropriate amount of fire state aid within 30 days of receiving the fire state aid from the Department of Revenue.
- Report annually to the Office of the State Auditor the amounts of fire state aid transmitted to each municipality.

Other municipality duties

- Certify that votes were conducted in accordance with statute to PERA before October 1, OR provide a copy of agreement before October 1, if applicable.
- If no Relief Association, request reimbursement by October 1.
- Inform PERA upon request of any associated relief associations.
- Use any fire state aid received only to reimburse employer contributions to the PERA P&F plan made during the previous year.

King asked if there is an established mechanism to prohibit coercion and retaliation, as specified in Method 1. Burkitt clarified that there is not a specific agency that will be tasked

to enforce that measure but rather each entity will have to force it on their firefighters. Fenske suggested removing the language or define it more.

Larson asked about the majority of the vote in favor of splitting the fire state aid versus having a 66 or 75 percent membership for the vote. Burkitt clarified that it was by consensus that the majority of the votes made more sense. Larson then suggested spending more time reviewing the language of the proposal to ensure a product that everyone can utilize.

Members agreed on the complexity of the issue and that more time was needed to make a decision. The item was tabled until the next meeting.

4. Recap of 2020 Legislative Accomplishments

Streng gave a summary of the provisions that were included in the 2020 Omnibus Retirement Bill:

- Plan name change to Statewide Volunteer Firefighter Plan;
- Allowing a fire chief to initiate a cost request;
- Clarification of alternative service pension calculation rules; and
- Clarification of responsibility for coverage approval.

Two items were not included:

- Determining vesting portability; and
- Recommendation on supplemental contributions.

5. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting of the SVF Advisory Board will be scheduled in October 2020.

6. Adjournment

Larson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Wood and passed unanimously by roll call vote.