

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Representative Dan Saddler

House Majority Leader • Serving Chugiak-Eagle River & Peters Creek

To: Representative Jesse Sumner
Chair, House Labor & Commerce Committee

From: Representative Dan Saddler *-DRS*
House Majority Leader

Date: March 25, 2024

Re: HB 218 Responses to Committee Questions

Please find below responses to questions asked during the March 20 hearing on HB 218: Firefighters Workers Comp Requirements.

What is the intention behind changing the language from becoming a firefighter to being certified as a firefighter?

The reason behind this change is to create clarity within statute regarding becoming a firefighter. As it currently stands, there is ambiguity when exactly someone may “become” a firefighter. In many departments, it is possible to be hired and fight fires without the Alaska Fire Standards Counsel firefighter I certification. The certification is required for firefighters to make entry into a burning building; however, there are many cases in which a person without certification can help fight fires such as on the exterior of buildings or vehicle fires.

Is there considerable time between being certified and hiring of a fire fighter which would necessitate an exam for each event?

The Alaska Fire Chiefs Association had requested that we amend statute to require an exam at both events. The time between hiring and certification – or in some cases, certification and hiring – can vary significantly for individuals. It is not uncommon for firefighters to be hired at a department and then months later be certified in the state.

Are we sure that workers' compensation insurers will continue to provide coverage with these changes since they may be assuming an increased volume of claims?

In the 32nd legislature, SB 131, amending the same statute, was discussed and similar questions were raised. Both the Division of Insurance and Workers Compensation Division said there was no indication that risk nor cost would increase as a result of that bill which was to add breast cancer to the list of covered diseases. The Department of Labor & Workforce Development maintains that position and does not foresee additional costs. Additionally, the National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) has weighed in and stated that any change in cost or risk would be incalculable due to how little this provision is used. NCCI agreed to draft an actuarial statement if desired.

For reference, larger municipal fire departments, like Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks, self-insure for workers comp. claims, and smaller volunteer departments go through private insurers for workers comp.