

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORT
2017 Legislative Session

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| Reference No.: | CB-3-2017 |
| Draft No.: | 2 |
| Committee: | PUBLIC SAFETY AND FISCAL MANAGEMENT |
| Date: | 03/09/2017 |
| Action: | FAV (A) |

REPORT: Favorable as Amended, 5-0 (In Favor: Council Members Glaros, Taveras, Harrison, Lehman, and Turner)

CB-3-2017 proposes to provide a presumption of illness standard allowing volunteer firefighters and their families to access disability and death benefits when the cause of disability or death heart or lung disease or some specific cancers. There is a presumption created that the illness is linked to fighting fires. The presumptive language in the legislation mirrors the career firefighters union contract's medical presumption language.

The Administration supports extending the presumption of illness to volunteer firefighters, but sought clarification about which volunteers the law would apply to. Amendments were made to apply the presumption to active volunteers and language was added to ensure the County is not liable for volunteers who serve as career firefighters in other jurisdictions.

The disability and death benefits in the County Code have not been updated since the 1970's. Draft 2 cleans out the Old language and codifies the requirement that the County provide a Blanket Life and Accident Insurance Policy. The County has a current policy which provides for death, disability and medical benefits, but many volunteers were unaware it exist. The new amendments require that active and incoming members must be notified of the existence of the policy.

The amendments to the bill also update the death benefits. In addition to the assurance of coverage from the Blanket Life And Accident Policy, draft 2 increases the death benefit for any member from \$5,000 to \$15,000 and makes clear this benefit is for any member who dies, and is not specific to a line of duty death.

Finally, there is an added line of duty death benefit for each year of additional service over 10 years. During the two committee sessions on CB-3-2016 the bill was supported by both Acting Fire Chief Barksdake and Julian Tucker from the Fire Commission expressed support for the Bill.

The Office of Audits and Investigations reports that Enactment of CB-3-2017 will have an adverse fiscal impact on the County. Allowing a presumption of a service-connected disability to be applied to certain conditions, or impairment of health that are commonly reoccurring conditions or impairments, will increase the County's financial burden for the payout of disability benefits. However, due to many environmental or occupational factors which could cause an eligible volunteer fire department or rescue squad member to suffer a condition or impairment of health which would be considered a service – connected disability, as defined within the proposed legislation, we are unable to determine the Bill's approximate fiscal impact on the County related to a service –connect disability. The annual cost of the Blanket Accident and Life Insurance Policy is currently accounted for within the County's Internal Service Fund Budget which accounts for employee benefits offered by the County. Therefore, the insurance policy's premium will not have an adverse fiscal impact on current County resources. After much deliberation the Public Safety and Fiscal Management Committee voted the bill out favorably 5-0 as amended.