



ISSUE BRIEF

House Bill 1627: Firefighter Participation in SLEP

IMRF Position:
OPPOSE

Sponsor:
Representative Lawrence Walsh, Jr.

Proposed Change in the Law

The bill would allow firefighters that participate in IMRF with employers that meet specific criteria to participate in IMRF SLEP. It would also create an occupational disease disability pension program for all firefighters and paramedics who participate in IMRF.

Reasons for Position

Firefighters who work for IMRF-participating employers that meet the following criteria would be placed in to SLEP:

1. Have at least 40 full-time firefighters;
2. Have a population of less than 5,000;
3. Not participate in an Article 4 fund;
4. Be located in a county with a population of greater than 1 million (i.e., Cook County).

The language of the bill would mean that an employer who meets these criteria but does not currently participate in IMRF would ostensibly be mandated to join IMRF only with respect to these employees. The bill would need to be amended to either create a process to allow that to occur or else limit it only to employers that currently participate in IMRF.

Members who have participated in IMRF as a firefighter prior to 1/1/2011 would remain in Tier 1 in the SLEP plan. It is unclear if this includes only time as a firefighter at that employer or if IMRF participation as a firefighter with any employer would count.

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IMRF currently has no equivalent to an occupational disease disability pension. This would require an entirely new structure to our disability program and would be virtually impossible to have it set up and ready to implement immediately upon signature by the governor. The language for this new program is taken from the current program for the Article 4 (downstate fire) pension systems. The language is not aligned with the terminology found in the IMRF Article, however, and would need to be amended to address concerns specific to IMRF, especially regarding Social Security coordination.

Disability benefits are currently pooled amongst all employers. It is likely, therefore, that this additional benefit would increase costs for all employers, even though very few would have members eligible to participate in the program. It would also increase IMRF's administrative costs since additional staff and programming would be required to create and administer this new program and this would also increase costs to all employers.

IMRF does not track job titles or positions of its members unless it is necessary to determine eligibility, which it is not for those participating as firefighters. IMRF therefore cannot give an estimate on the cost of this change since we have no way of knowing how many members might be affected.

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