

Permanent Fire Benefit Charge Option

BACKGROUND

(Fire) Benefit Charges (FBC) have been authorized for fire protection districts since 1974. Regional Fire Authorities were also granted this funding option upon their creation. By statute, the FBC must be reasonably proportioned to the measurable benefits to property resulting from the services afforded by the district, and taxing authority of the Fire Protection District is reduced. The initial term of the FBC is up to six years, and reauthorization is for six consecutive years.

In order to establish an FBC, the governing body must draft a resolution to bring before the voters and provide a public hearing. A 60% super majority must approve the ballot measure. The continuation of an FBC requires simple majority approval and expires after six years.

WSCFF POSITION

When considering the continuation of an FBC, citizens should have the opportunity to make the FBC permanent by simple majority vote at reauthorization.

WSCFF EXPLANATION

(Fire) Benefit Charges allow fire protection districts (and the citizens they serve) to be less dependent on property taxes and bases a portion of rates on service level needs. Public hearings by the governing body are required annually regarding the FBC, and at no point may the FBC exceed 60% of the budget.

Fire protection districts have the responsibility for all hazard response and prevention activities and are integral to the public safety of their communities. Election costs divert scarce resources away from the direct delivery of fire and emergency medical services.

The fire service has evolved over the past several decades, meeting ever-growing calls for service from their communities with increased efficiency and accountability. The best way to ensure that fire departments can continue to meet the demands of their citizens is by consistent and reliable funding.

CURRENT STATUS

Legislation will be introduced in the 2020 legislative session to allow fire protection districts to permanently reauthorize FBCs by simple majority following the initial imposition by the 60% super majority.