

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

H.B. 355
Mar 10, 2025
HOUSE PRINCIPAL CLERK

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HOUSE BILL DRH30162-MH-32

Short Title: LRC Study Future of Rural Firefighting. (Public)

Sponsors: Representative Pyrtle.

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO DIRECT THE LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
3 FUTURE OF FIREFIGHTING IN RURAL AREAS OF THE STATE.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **SECTION 1.(a)** Study. – The Legislative Research Commission (LRC) shall
6 conduct a comprehensive review of firefighting in rural areas of the State. The purpose of the
7 study is to examine current trends, problems, and opportunities confronting rural fire departments
8 and suggest funding and other legislative actions needed to keep those fire departments fiscally
9 sound and mission effective.

10 **SECTION 1.(b)** Scope. – The study conducted by the LRC under this section shall
11 examine and evaluate, at a minimum, the following:

- 12 (1) Volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention. Identify programs, actions, or
13 incentives that could increase recruitment and retention, including (i) financial
14 incentives or benefits; or (ii) modern, comprehensive training programs to
15 ensure volunteers are properly certified and equipped to perform their duties.
- 16 (2) Funding and resource allocation, including (i) an analysis of the current
17 distribution of funding and how it could be improved to ensure that rural fire
18 departments have the resources they need to continue to meet their mission,
19 (ii) opportunities for federal and State grants specifically for rural firefighting
20 needs, and (iii) strategies for purchasing and maintaining costly equipment
21 such as fire trucks, hoses, and protective gear.
- 22 (3) Interagency cooperation and mutual aid agreements, including how such
23 agreements can be strengthened, how to improve collaboration among rural
24 departments and between rural and urban departments to allow for more
25 effective response during large-scale emergencies, and best practices for
26 sharing resources and training among fire departments, law enforcement, and
27 emergency medical services in rural areas.
- 28 (4) The physical, mental, and emotional toll that rural firefighting takes on
29 firefighters, including identification of programs to help maintain firefighter
30 health and well-being.
- 31 (5) Public education and outreach, including (i) fire safety programs to ensure that
32 residents in rural North Carolina are educated about fire safety, such as
33 creating defensible space around their properties and understanding how to
34 evacuate in case of fire, and (ii) programs to engage and encourage youth
35 involvement in firefighting, building interest in the profession among young
36 people.



- (6) Long-term sustainability and community engagement, including reducing the environmental impact of fire response activities and encouraging community-driven approaches to firefighting, such as neighborhood fire prevention efforts or local fire departments hosting regular community engagement events.

SECTION 1.(c) Stakeholder Engagement. – The LRC shall engage stakeholders, including fire chiefs and firefighters from rural departments, representatives of statewide organizations for firefighters and fire departments, rural community leaders, and the Office of State Fire Marshal. The LRC shall conduct at least three public hearings, one in each geographic region of the State (Western, Central, and Eastern North Carolina), to gather public input and recommendations. The LRC shall open a public comment period of at least 90 days during which individuals, fire departments, and organizations may submit feedback.

SECTION 1.(d) Report and Legislative Action. – The LRC shall submit an interim report on the results of the study authorized by this section, including any recommended legislation, to the 2025 General Assembly when it reconvenes for the 2026 session. The LRC shall submit a final report to the 2027 General Assembly.

SECTION 2. Effective Date. – This act is effective when it becomes law.