



Albemarle County

Legislation Text

File #: 16-140, **Version:** 1

AGENDA DATE: 2/3/2016

TITLE:

Fire/Rescue Personnel Over-hires

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Authorize the Fire Rescue Department to over-hire up to four full-time firefighter/EMTs

ITEM TYPE: Regular Action Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Foley, Walker, Davis, Eggleston, Puckett

PRESENTER (S): Dan Eggleston

LEGAL REVIEW: Yes

REVIEWED BY: Thomas C. Foley

BACKGROUND: In December of 2010, the Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue (ACFR) recommended that the Board authorize ACFR to “over-hire” up to two positions to more effectively manage vacancies, leave, and restricted duty (Attachment A). These over-hires did not change the official FTE count and are funded through a combination of overtime savings and salary lapse from vacant positions. The Board authorized the over-hires and ACFR has been successful in implementing this strategy by reacting to staffing changes more quickly and remaining within the operations salary budget for the past three fiscal years.

Now, due to the expansion of service and an increase in the number of employees on light or restricted duty, ACFR is again unable to effectively manage scheduled and unscheduled leave in the current staffing model without a sharp increase in the number of mandatory overtime shifts. ACFR seeks Board approval to over-hire an additional two firefighter positions, for a total of four over-hire positions.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Goal 6: *Operational Capacity*: Ensure County government’s ability to provide high quality service that achieves community priorities

DISCUSSION: Since 2010, ACFR has expanded service to include the Ivy Fire Rescue station, the Berkmar Drive ambulance, and the Pantops daytime ambulance, adding a minimum of 10 staffing positions daily. Furthermore, due to the demands of 24/7 service, ACFR must fill positions that are vacant due to unscheduled leave (including sick leave, illness in family, death in family, leave without pay, worker’s comp, light duty, and Family and Medical Leave Act leave). Light duty is a restricted assignment given to employees of ACFR who, due to injury, illness, disability, or pregnancy, are temporarily unable to perform their regular assignments. Light duty is not leave because the employee is, in fact, working. Light duty is viewed like leave for purposes of this discussion, however, because it creates a vacancy in a minimum staffing position in the field, just as other unscheduled leave does. In this vein, light duty is ACFR’s largest category of unscheduled leave, accounting for 43% of all unscheduled leave in FY15. Historically, ACFR has had two to three personnel on light duty throughout the year, and with personnel aging, this trend is likely to continue. This need to fill unscheduled leave, combined with the additional daily demand on staffing due to ACFR’s expanded service, has made the two over-hire positions less effective and has resulted in more erratic

overtime usage and record high mandatory overtime. In the first six months of FY 16 ACFR has experienced more staff hold-over than in all of FY 15 (Attachment B, slide 2).

Mandatory overtime is created when no employees voluntarily accept overtime necessary for ACFR to maintain minimum staffing, requiring ACFR to “hold” someone from the off-going shift. This mandatory overtime predominantly consists of 12 hour shifts from 6am to 6pm, occurring after the employee has just completed a 24-hour shift. These resulting 36-hour shifts impact the employees by effecting their ability to reliably plan for basic necessities on their scheduled days off, such as child care or medical appointments. As the need for mandatory overtime increases, employees are less likely to accept voluntary overtime in an attempt to avoid working more hours than desired, compounding the problem by creating more mandatory overtime. This high amount of mandatory overtime has a profound negative affect on employee morale, which can lead to higher employee turnover and increased costs. Additionally, overworked personnel are more likely to make mistakes or have accidents while performing their duties. The increase in holdover shifts puts employees and citizens at increased risk.

ACFR has reviewed several options with the Office of Management and Budget and the County Executive’s office to address this issue, including:

Do nothing

If ACFR fails to address this issue, erratic overtime and high mandatory holdovers will likely continue. This has already led to poor employee morale and will likely result in higher employee turnover, increased cost, and loss of experience and skill in the field.

Increased volunteers

Whenever possible, ACFR uses volunteers to fill slots created by unscheduled leave. However, this is often difficult because the primary need is Monday through Friday during the day (Attachment B, slide 4), and many of the volunteers have jobs during this time. ACFR is currently providing staffing at several volunteer stations during this time due to lack of volunteer availability.

Furthermore, even when a volunteer is available during the day, the individual must have the same level of minimum certifications required for the slot being filled. This is frequently not the case. As ACFR continues to recruit new daytime volunteers and as current daytime volunteers have the time to continue with advanced certification training, ACFR may see the volunteers having a larger impact on managing leave and overtime. In the immediate future, however, mandatory overtime will still be required.

Part-time personnel

Part-time personnel could ease the burden on staff during peak overtime periods, but it may be difficult to successfully institute this program while maintaining current minimum training standards. ACFR currently provides a ten-week recruit school followed by four weeks of field training prior to personnel filling minimum staffing positions. Due to the time commitment, it is unlikely an individual seeking part-time employment would be willing or able to complete this process. If someone were willing to make that initial commitment, the individual would have to be compensated for the entire 14 week period prior to ACFR seeing any impact on daily staffing. This represents a significant investment for part-time personnel who will have a higher level of turnover than full-time employees.

Browning out stations

Closing stations as staffing levels become critical will address the staffing problems and create cost savings, but it will also have a detrimental impact on service delivery and will result in complaints from the citizens served by those stations.

Increase over-hire positions

Increasing approved over-hire positions from two to four would allow ACFR to hire the appropriate number of employees based on the available budget, number of vacancies, amount of employees on FML or restricted duty, and available volunteers. This option would allow ACFR to address the problem in a consistent and reliable manner while remaining within the salary budget. Over-hiring is a common practice that is already being utilized within the County not only by ACFR, but also by the Police Department and the ECC. ACFR has five years of successful history with this strategy, and staff believes this success will continue with the proposed increased number of over-hires. To recognize the full impact in FY17, the additional over-hires should be made available by March of FY16 to allow for hiring and training processes. Based on current revenue and expenditure projections, ACFR, in conjunction with OMB, believes this can be accomplished within the current FY 16 budget.

BUDGET IMPACT: It is not anticipated that the increase of two over-hire positions will impact the ACFR budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board authorize ACFR to over-hire two additional firefighter positions for a total of four over-hire positions above the current FTE count.

- A - 2010 Executive Summary
- B - Overtime Counts