

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2019 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

Senate Bill 291

SENATORS SYPOLT, BALDWIN, MAYNARD, RUCKER, AND

ROBERTS, *original sponsors*

[Originating in the Committee on Finance; Reported

on February 8, 2019]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §5H-1-1, §5H-1-2, and §5H-1-3 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931,
2 as amended, all relating generally to survivor benefits for emergency response providers;
3 changing the name of the West Virginia Fire and EMS Survivor Benefit Act to the West
4 Virginia Emergency Responders Survivor Benefit Act; making Division of Forestry
5 personnel who die as a proximate result of their participation in wildland fire fighting,
6 emergency response, or disaster response operations eligible for survivor benefits;
7 defining terms; making technical changes; and reorganizing language in the act for clarity.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 1. WEST VIRGINIA FIRE AND EMS EMERGENCY RESPONDERS
SURVIVOR BENEFIT ACT.**

§5H-1-1. Title and legislative intent.

1 (a) This article is known as the "~~West Virginia Fire, EMS and Law Enforcement Officer~~
2 ~~Survivor Benefit~~ West Virginia Emergency Responders Survivor Benefit Act.

3 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature to provide for the payment of death benefits to the
4 surviving spouse, designated beneficiary, children, or parents of firefighters, EMS personnel, and
5 law-enforcement personnel, and Division of Forestry personnel killed in the performance of their
6 emergency response duties.

§5H-1-2. Death benefit for survivors.

1 (~~a) In the event a firefighter, EMS, or law-enforcement provider dies as a proximate result~~
2 ~~of the performance of, his or her duties, the department chief, within 30 days from the date of~~
3 ~~death shall submit certification of the death to the Governor's Office.~~

4 (~~b) This act includes both paid and volunteer fire, EMS, and law-enforcement personnel~~
5 ~~acting in the performance of his or her duties of any fire, EMS, or law-enforcement department~~
6 ~~certified by the State of West Virginia.~~

7 ~~(c) A firefighter, EMS, or law enforcement provider is considered to be acting in the~~
8 ~~performance of his or her duties for the purposes of this act when he or she is participating in any~~
9 ~~role of a fire, EMS, or law enforcement department function. This includes training, administration~~
10 ~~meetings, fire, EMS, or law enforcement incidents, service calls, apparatus, equipment or station~~
11 ~~maintenance, fundraisers, and travel to or from such functions.~~

12 ~~(d) Travel includes riding upon or in any apparatus or vehicle which is owned or used by~~
13 ~~the fire, EMS, or law enforcement department, or any other vehicle going to or directly returning~~
14 ~~from a firefighter's home, place of business, or other place where he or she shall have been prior~~
15 ~~to participating in a fire, EMS, or law enforcement department function, or upon the authorization~~
16 ~~of the chief of the department, agency head, or other person in charge~~

17 (a) Terms. — For the purposes of this article, the following terms have the following
18 meanings:

19 (1) "Emergency responder" means a paid or volunteer firefighter, EMS personnel, law-
20 enforcement agency personnel, or Division of Forestry personnel.

21 (2) "Emergency response duties" means:

22 (A) For a firefighter, EMS provider, or law-enforcement personnel, participation in any role
23 of a fire department, EMS agency, or law-enforcement agency function, including, but not limited
24 to: Training functions; administrative meetings; fire department, EMS agency, or law-enforcement
25 incidents or service calls; apparatus, equipment, or station maintenance; and fundraisers,
26 including travel to or from such functions; and

27 (B) For a Division of Forestry employee, participation in Division of Forestry wildland fire
28 fighting, emergency, or disaster response operations, including, but not limited to, travel to and
29 from the locations of wildland fires, emergencies, or disasters.

30 (3) "Law-enforcement agency" means any duly authorized state, county, or municipal
31 organization employing one or more persons whose responsibility is the enforcement of laws of
32 the state or any county or municipality thereof: *Provided*, That neither the Public Service

33 Commission nor any state institution of higher education nor any resort area district is a law-
34 enforcement agency.

35 (4) "Travel" includes riding upon or in any apparatus or vehicle which is owned or used by
36 the fire department, EMS agency, law-enforcement agency, or the Division of Forestry, or any
37 other vehicle going to, or directly returning from, an emergency responder's home, place of
38 business, or other place where he or she shall have been prior to participating in a fire department
39 function, EMS agency function, law-enforcement agency function, or a Division of Forestry
40 wildland fire-fighting operation, or upon the authorization of the chief of the department, agency
41 head, or other person in charge.

42 (b) An emergency responder who dies as a proximate result of the performance of his or
43 her emergency response duties is eligible for the survivor benefits established by this act.

44 ~~(e)~~ (c) Within 30 days after the death of an eligible emergency responder, the department
45 or agency head shall submit certification of the death to the Governor's Office. Certification of the
46 death shall include the name of the certified fire department, EMS agency, or law-enforcement
47 program agency, or Division of Forestry program, the name of the deceased firefighter, EMS, or
48 law-enforcement provider emergency responder, the name or names and addresses of the
49 beneficiary or beneficiaries, any documentation designating a beneficiary or beneficiaries, and
50 setting forth a description of the circumstances that qualify the deceased individual for death
51 survivor benefits under this act.

52 (d) Upon receipt of the certification of the death from the certified fire department, EMS
53 agency, or law-enforcement program agency, or Division of Forestry program, the state shall,
54 from moneys from the State Treasury, General Fund, pay to the certified fire department, EMS
55 agency, or law-enforcement program agency, or Division of Forestry program the sum of
56 \$100,000 in the name of the beneficiary or beneficiaries of the emergency responder eligible for
57 the death benefit. Within five days of receipt of this sum from the state, the fire department, EMS
58 agency, or law-enforcement program agency, or Division of Forestry Program certified by the

59 ~~state~~ shall pay the sum as a benefit to the surviving designated beneficiary or beneficiaries. ~~Within~~
60 ~~five days of receipt of this sum from the state, the fire department, EMS agency, or law-~~
61 ~~enforcement program department certified by the state shall pay the sum as a benefit to the~~
62 ~~surviving designated beneficiary or beneficiaries.~~ If there is no surviving designated beneficiary,
63 then the sum shall be paid as if the decedent had designated as beneficiaries those persons who
64 are entitled to inherit the decedent's intestate estate, in the proportions established by §42-1-3
65 and §42-1-3a of this code. It is the responsibility of the certified fire department, EMS agency, or
66 law-enforcement program agency, or Division of Forestry program to document the beneficiary or
67 beneficiaries above mentioned for purposes of reporting to the Governor's Office.

68 (f) ~~(e)~~ Any death ruled by a physician to be a result of an injury sustained ~~during any of~~
69 ~~the above mentioned performance of fire department, EMS, or law enforcement duties~~ during
70 performance of emergency response duties ~~will be~~ makes a deceased emergency responder
71 eligible for this benefit, ~~even if this death occurs at a later time~~ regardless of when the death
72 occurs.

73 (g) ~~(f)~~ ~~Those individuals who are covered by this article are eligible~~ The death of an eligible
74 emergency responder qualifies his or her beneficiaries for only one state death benefit, paid
75 pursuant to the provisions of this section, regardless of the amount.

76 (h) ~~(g)~~ Every department or agency head employing persons to which this article applies
77 shall provide notice of the benefit provided hereby to such employees and encourage covered
78 employees to provide a written designation of beneficiary to be maintained in the employee's
79 personnel file.

80 (i) ~~(h)~~ ~~Any person making application for certification as a firefighter to which this section~~
81 ~~applies~~ A person applying to the State Fire Marshal for certification as a firefighter shall provide a
82 written designation of beneficiary using forms and procedures prescribed by the State Fire
83 Marshal.

84 (i) Any A person making application applying to the Commissioner of the Bureau for Public
85 Health for emergency medical services personnel certification ~~to which this section applies~~ shall
86 provide a written designation of beneficiary using forms and procedures prescribed by the
87 commissioner ~~of the Bureau for Public Health~~.

88 ~~(j) The operation of the amendments to this section enacted during the 2018 Regular~~
89 ~~Session and 2018 First Extraordinary Session of the Legislature shall be effective retroactively to~~
90 ~~January 1, 2018.~~

§5H-1-3. Effective date.

1 (a) The effective date for this act is January 1, 2007. The operation of the amendments to
2 this article enacted during the year 2012 shall be effective retroactively to January 1, 2012.

3 (b) The operation of the amendments to this article enacted during the 2018 First
4 Extraordinary Session of the Legislature shall be effective retroactively to January 1, 2018.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to include Division of Forestry employees eligible for survivor benefits as other first responders if they are killed while engaging in wildland fire fighting. This an Interim Committee bill recommended for introduction and passage by the Forest Management Review Commission.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.