

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 5660

By Delegates Hardy, Hornby, Hite, and Statler

[Introduced February 13, 2024; Referred to the
Committee on Political Subdivisions then Government
Organization]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §7-17-12 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to
2 giving power to modify county fire service fees to the county commission instead of the
3 county fire board.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 17. COUNTY FIRE BOARDS.

§7-17-12. County fire service fees; petition; election; dedication; and amendment.

1 (a) Every county commission which provides fire protection services has plenary power
2 and authority to provide by ordinance for the continuance or improvement of such service, to make
3 regulations with respect thereto, and to impose by ordinance, upon the users of such services,
4 reasonable fire service rates, fees, and charges to be collected in the manner specified in the
5 ordinance.

6 (b) Any fees imposed under this article are dedicated to the county fire board for the
7 purposes provided in this article.

8 (c) A county commission can impose by ordinance, upon the users of such service, a
9 reasonable fire service fee, by one of two methods:

10 (1) Ten percent of the qualified voters shall present a petition duly signed by them in their
11 own handwriting, and filed with the clerk of the county commission, directing that the county
12 commission impose such a fee. The county commission shall not have a lien on any property as
13 security for payments due under the ordinance. Any ordinance enacted under the provisions of
14 this section shall be published as a Class II legal advertisement in compliance with the provisions
15 of §59-3-1 *et seq.* of this code, and the publication area for such publication shall be the county in
16 which the county fire board is located. In the event 30 percent of the qualified voters of the county
17 by petition duly signed by them in their own handwriting and filed with the clerk of the county
18 commission within 45 days after the expiration of such publication protest against such ordinance
19 as enacted or amended, the ordinance may not become effective until it is ratified by a majority of
20 the legal votes cast thereon by the qualified voters of such county at any primary or general

21 election as the county commission directs. Voting thereon may not take place until after notice of
22 the submission has been given by publication as above provided for the publication of the
23 ordinance after it is adopted. The powers and authority hereby granted to county commissions are
24 in addition to and supplemental to the powers and authority otherwise granted to them by other
25 provisions of this code; or

26 (2) If the ~~county fire board~~ county commission determines an amendment in the fee
27 imposed in subsection (a) of this article is necessary, ~~it may, by resolution, request the county~~
28 ~~commission for such a change. Upon receipt of the resolution from the county fire board~~ the county
29 commission shall, by ballot referendum, amend the ordinance imposing a fire fee and adopt the
30 changes in the fee. ~~requested by the county fire board~~

31 (A) This referendum, to determine whether it is the will of the voters of a county that an
32 amendment to the fire fee is necessary, may be held at any regular primary or general election, or,
33 in conjunction with any other countywide election. Any election at which the question of amending
34 the fire fee is voted upon shall be held at the voting precincts established for holding primary or
35 general elections. All of the provisions of the election laws, when not in conflict with the provisions
36 of this article, shall apply to voting and elections hereunder, insofar as practicable. The county
37 commission shall, not less than 90 days before the election, order that the issue be placed on the
38 ballot and referendum held at the next primary or general election to determine whether it is the will
39 of the voters of the county that a fire fee be amended: *Provided*, That prior to issuing the order, the
40 county commission shall publish the ordinance which must contain the anticipated allocation of
41 any fees or charges and which would be enacted should the referendum succeed as a Class II
42 legal advertisement in compliance with the provisions of §59-3-1 *et seq.* of this code, and the
43 publication area for such publication shall be the county in which the county fire board is located.

44 (B) The ballot, or the ballot labels where voting machines are used, shall have printed
45 thereon substantially the following:

46 "Shall the county commission be permitted to amend the fire fee in _____ County,

47 West Virginia?

48 For the fee amendment.

49 Against the fee amendment.

50 (Place a cross mark in the square opposite your choice.)"

51 (C) If a majority of legal votes cast upon the question be for the fire fee amendment, the
52 county commission shall, after the certification of the results of the referendum, thereafter adopt
53 an ordinance, within 60 days of certification, establishing the fire fee amendment in the county:
54 *Provided*, That such program shall be implemented and operational no later than 12 months
55 following certification. If a majority of the legal votes cast upon the question be against the fire fee
56 amendment, then the policy shall not take effect, but the question may again be submitted to a
57 referendum at any subsequent election in the manner herein provided.

58 (d) In the event that a majority of the votes cast upon a question submitted pursuant to this
59 section at any primary election be against the question, the question may again be submitted to
60 the voters at the next succeeding general election.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to give power to modify county fire service fees to the county commission instead of the county fire board.

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