

HCS HB 508 -- FIRE PROTECTION

SPONSOR: Johnson, 47

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Local Government by a vote of 10 to 8.

This substitute requires certain fire districts located in St. Louis County which include certain street light maintenance districts to establish wards equivalent to the number of fire district directors for the purpose of electing new directors. The wards must be established after proper notice and within 60 days after August 28, 2003, and thereafter within six months after each decennial census. If the fire district fails to establish boundaries within the deadline, the governing body of the county must establish the wards within certain restrictions outlined in the substitute. The substitute establishes qualifications of directors, election procedures, and the filling of vacancies.

The substitute also prohibits firefighters from electioneering while on duty or while wearing a uniform. Violations may result in forfeiture of employment.

FISCAL NOTE: Not available at time of printing.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that firemen certified in any accredited fire academy should be able to work anywhere in the state. St. Louis City and St. Louis County currently do not allow firefighters to work in their fire districts if they are not accredited in their jurisdiction. Firefighters should not be able to use their position of authority to influence an election. Fire districts are controlled by the unions, and the residents of the districts are being ignored. Residents don't have a voice in what is going on in fire districts.

Testifying for the bill were Representatives Walton and Parker; and Firefighters League for the Advancement of Minority Equalization.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that firefighters have the right to work on issues related to elections. Firemen would lose fights if they could not electioneer. Counties make rules regarding where a fireman must be trained. Firemen need to be trained for the area and type of firefighting they are going to be doing. Training is designed for specific areas of the state. There is a problem with racial tension in the St. Louis area. The bill will not help with racial problems or with the hiring of more black firefighters.

Testifying against the bill was Missouri State Council of Firefighters.

Steve Bauer, Legislative Analyst