

# HB455 INTRODUCED



1 508NM3-1  
2 By Representatives Standridge, Lovvorn, Shedd, Harbison,  
3 Shaver, Smith, Sorrells, Hammett, Robertson, Crawford,  
4 Chestnut, Travis, Pringle, Reynolds, Hill  
5 RFD: Urban and Rural Development  
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8 2023 Regular Session



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SYNOPSIS:

Under existing law, a steering committee is empowered to make recommendations to the State Forester regarding improving rural community fire departments and overall fire response.

This bill would create the Rural and Community Fire Protection Advisory Committee to support and recommend to the State Forester methods to improve rural and community fire protection in this state.

This bill would also provide for the Rural and Community Fire Protection Development and Improvement Grant Program to aide volunteer fire departments in achieving certain enumerated goals aimed at improving rural and community fire protection in this state.

A BILL  
TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

Relating to volunteer fire departments; to amend Sections 9-3-11, 9-3-12, and 9-3-13, Code of Alabama 1975, to create and provide duties and procedures for the Rural and Community Fire Protection Advisory Committee; and to add Section 9-3-21 to the Code of Alabama 1975, to create and



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29 provide procedures for administration of the Rural and  
30 Community Fire Protection Development and Improvement Grant  
31 Program.

32 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

33 Section 1. Sections 9-3-11, 9-3-12, and 9-3-13, Code of  
34 Alabama 1975, are amended to read as follows:

35 "§9-3-11

36 The State Forester ~~is hereby authorized and required to~~  
37 shall create ~~a steering committee~~ the Rural and Community  
38 Fire Protection Advisory Committee to represent ~~rural~~  
39 ~~community-certified volunteer~~ fire departments and to support  
40 the development and improvement of rural and community fire  
41 protection throughout the state."

42 "§9-3-12

43 ~~Said steering committee shall be composed of 13~~  
44 ~~members; one from each of the 10 administrative districts of~~  
45 ~~the Alabama Forestry Commission, one member from the Alabama~~  
46 ~~Association of Volunteer Fire Departments, one member from the~~  
47 ~~Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs and one member from the~~  
48 ~~Alabama Firemen's Association. The President of the Alabama~~  
49 ~~Association of Fire Chiefs shall appoint one member of his~~  
50 ~~association to serve on the committee, the President of the~~  
51 ~~Alabama Association of Volunteer Fire Departments shall~~  
52 ~~appoint one member of his association to serve on the~~  
53 ~~committee, and the President of the Alabama Firemen's~~  
54 ~~Association shall appoint a member of his association to serve~~  
55 ~~on the committee. The State Forester shall appoint the~~  
56 ~~remaining committee members from each administrative district~~



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57 ~~of the Alabama Forestry Commission, with each such member~~  
58 ~~being a volunteer fireman. All members shall serve at the~~  
59 ~~pleasure of their appointing authority. Vacancies on the~~  
60 ~~committee shall be filled by the same appointing authority who~~  
61 ~~appointed the vacating member.~~

62 (a) The Rural and Community Fire Protection Advisory  
63 Committee shall be composed of 13 members to be appointed as  
64 follows:

65 (1) One member of the Alabama Association of Fire  
66 Chiefs shall be appointed by the president of that  
67 association.

68 (2) One member of the Alabama Association of Volunteer  
69 Fire Departments shall be appointed by the president of that  
70 association.

71 (3) One member of the Alabama Firefighter's Association  
72 shall be appointed by the president of that association.

73 (4) One member from each of the following districts,  
74 all of whom must be volunteer firefighters and reside in the  
75 district they represent, shall be appointed by the State  
76 Forester:

77 a. District 1: Calhoun, Cherokee, DeKalb, Etowah,  
78 Jackson, Madison, and Marshall counties.

79 b. District 2: Blount, Cullman, Jefferson, Shelby, St.  
80 Clair, Walker, and Winston counties.

81 c. District 3: Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens,  
82 Sumter, and Tuscaloosa counties.

83 d. District 4: Chambers, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa,  
84 Randolph, Talladega, and Tallapoosa counties.



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85 e. District 5: Autauga, Bibb, Chilton, Dallas, Marengo,  
86 Perry, and Wilcox counties.

87 f. District 6: Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Henry,  
88 Houston, and Pike counties.

89 g. District 7: Butler, Conecuh, Covington, Crenshaw,  
90 Escambia, and Monroe counties.

91 h. District 8: Baldwin, Choctaw, Clarke, Mobile, and  
92 Washington counties.

93 i. District 9: Colbert, Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence,  
94 Limestone, Marion, and Morgan counties.

95 j. District 10: Bullock, Elmore, Lee, Lowndes, Macon,  
96 Montgomery, and Russell counties.

97 (b) All members shall serve at the pleasure of their  
98 appointing authority. Any vacancy on the committee shall be  
99 appointed by the appointing authority of the vacating member."

100 "§9-3-13

101 The ~~steering advisory~~ committee shall make  
102 recommendations to the State Forester regarding ~~how to improve~~  
103 ~~the rural community fire program and how to solve immediate~~  
104 ~~problems including parts exchange, training and financial~~  
105 ~~assistance through federal grants~~ the development and  
106 improvement of rural and community fire protection throughout  
107 this state. The advisory committee shall also make  
108 recommendations to the Alabama Forestry Commission regarding  
109 rural and community fire protection grants awarded pursuant to  
110 Section 9-3-21."

111 Section 2. Section 9-3-21 is added to the Code of  
112 Alabama 1975 to read as follows:



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113 §9-3-21

114 (a) The Alabama Forestry Commission shall establish and  
115 administer the Rural and Community Fire Protection Development  
116 and Improvement grant program to aid volunteer fire  
117 departments in providing rural and community fire protection  
118 in this state.

119 (b) There is established the Rural and Community Fire  
120 Protection Development and Improvement Fund in the State  
121 Treasury. The fund shall be subject to appropriations by the  
122 Legislature and any gifts, grants, or other donations received  
123 by the commission on behalf of the fund. This fund shall be  
124 administered by the commission and all monies disbursed from  
125 the fund shall be under the supervision of the State Forester.  
126 To defray costs of administering the fund, the commission may  
127 retain five percent of all monies appropriated to the fund  
128 each fiscal year to be used for any purpose. Any unexpended or  
129 unencumbered funds remaining in the fund at the end of the  
130 fiscal year shall not revert but shall be retained for  
131 continued use in accordance with this section.

132 (c) Grants awarded from the fund shall only be to  
133 volunteer fire departments certified in accordance with  
134 Section 9-3-17, including nonprofit corporations,  
135 municipalities, and fire districts which have formed or have  
136 otherwise authorized such certified volunteer fire  
137 departments, county volunteer fire associations organized and  
138 incorporated in this state, or other nonprofit entities  
139 established for the provision or support of rural and  
140 community fire protection in this state.



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141 (d) Each fiscal year in which funds are appropriated or  
142 otherwise made available for the grant program, the commission  
143 shall only award grants that address one or more of the  
144 following goals:

145 (1) To increase volunteer fire service recruitment and  
146 encourage existing firefighters to remain in the volunteer  
147 fire service.

148 (2) To provide compensation or other benefits to  
149 increase staffing by departments.

150 (3) To form new volunteer fire departments in areas of  
151 this state without sufficient fire protection.

152 (4) To build, expand, or maintain structures having the  
153 primary purpose of housing certified volunteer fire  
154 departments and their equipment.

155 (5) To enable or improve communication capabilities for  
156 certified volunteer fire departments, including creating or  
157 expanding broadband Internet access, erecting or maintaining  
158 communication towers and equipment, and acquiring real  
159 property upon which to place communication towers having the  
160 primary purpose of serving a department.

161 (6) To acquire real property to be used as sites for  
162 fire stations for certified volunteer fire departments.

163 (7) To provide firefighting apparatus and equipment for  
164 certified volunteer fire departments.

165 (8) To provide training of all types to certified  
166 volunteer fire departments.

167 (9) To increase the availability of water supplies for  
168 certified volunteer fire departments, including installing wet



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169 or dry fire hydrants.

170 (e) All grant proposals shall first be reviewed by the  
171 Rural and Community Fire Protection Advisory Committee who  
172 shall then recommend to the commission which proposals should  
173 be given priority for funding. The commission shall give  
174 consideration to the advisory committee's recommendations but  
175 shall retain full discretion in determining which proposals  
176 are funded.

177 (f) Proposals may be fully funded as submitted or  
178 awarded in a different amount than proposed, as determined by  
179 the commission. When awarding funding pursuant to this  
180 section, the commission shall consider both the geographic and  
181 racial diversity of the state.

182 (g) The commission may also directly expend a portion  
183 of the funds in the Rural and Community Fire Protection  
184 Development and Improvement Fund in furtherance of any of the  
185 goals stated in subsection (d).

186 (h) (1) The commission shall coordinate and implement a  
187 statewide training program for the entities eligible to  
188 receive a grant. The program shall provide basic instruction  
189 concerning fiscal policies and procedures and any other legal  
190 requirements regarding receiving, accounting for, and  
191 disbursing grant funds. The costs of administering this  
192 program shall be paid from the Rural and Community Fire  
193 Protection Development and Improvement Fund.

194 (2) No entity shall receive any funding pursuant to  
195 this section unless at least two of its current officers,  
196 including its chief fiscal officer, have received training in



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197 accordance with this subsection.

198 (3) All agencies of the state are hereby authorized and  
199 directed to extend their cooperation and give assistance to  
200 the commission in providing training required by this  
201 subsection.

202 (i) No compensation or benefits paid or provided to  
203 volunteer firefighters in furtherance of this section shall  
204 affect the minimum percentage of unsalaried membership of a  
205 certified volunteer fire department as required by Section  
206 9-3-17(a)(2).

207 (j) The Alabama Forestry Commission may adopt rules as  
208 necessary to implement and administer this section.

209 (k) Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the  
210 contrary, the powers, authority, and jurisdiction of the  
211 Division of Construction Management within the Department of  
212 Finance shall not extend to any property or construction  
213 project purchased or funded, in whole or in part, with monies  
214 derived from the Rural and Community Fire Protection  
215 Development and Improvement Fund; provided, that the Division  
216 of Construction Management shall retain its authority to adopt  
217 a uniform minimum building standards code that will apply to  
218 such properties and construction projects.

219 Section 3. This act shall become effective on the first  
220 day of the third month following its passage and approval by  
221 the Governor, or its otherwise becoming law.