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| **H. 3252** | | |
| Sponsors: White | Introduced: January 12, 2021 | Referred: Labor, Commerce, and Industry |

**SYNOPSIS of Bill AS REFERRED**

H. 3252 amends the laws relating to the V-SAFE program so as to simplify the definition of fire departments within the act and simplify the description of the projects in which the funds may be used. Further, the bill increases the grant amounts that go to the program. Additional funds are directed to the program from insurance premium taxes and the additional depreciation reimbursement.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(A)** clarifies that V-SAFE is within the Division of State Fire Marshal.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(B)(1)** raises the maximum grant amount to chartered fire departments from $30,000 to $40,000.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(B)(2)** says that the maximum grant amount given in (B)(1) must be cumulatively increased by a percentage equal to the increase in the average of the previous year’s consumer indices plus the percentage increase in the population of the state in the previous year. The Revenue and Fiscal Affairs office must report the increase in amount to the Division of State Fire Marshal by May 1 of each year.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(C)(1)** is amended to simplify the definition of fire departments eligible for the V-SAFE program. The amended definition states that a “chartered fire department” includes any fire department that has a charter from the Division of State Fire Marshal.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(C)(2)** is amended to only allow grants to chartered fire departments with at least 75% volunteer staff instead of 50% as previously permitted. Also, a provision is removed from the section that requires departments that receive grants to comply with the firefighter registration provisions and sign the statewide mutual aid agreement with the South Carolina Emergency Management Division.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(D)** is amended to reflect the change to $40,000 maximum grant provision, unless the grant is for real property or improvements to real property. If the grant is for real property or improvements, the department must provide at least 5% in matching funds or in-kind money, such as building plans.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(E)** removes a list of purposes that the grant money may be used for and states that the grants only may be used for equipment, vehicles, training, and real property, or improvements to real property that includes updates and rehabilitations.

**Section 1, § 23-9-25(G)** allows 2% of funds to be awarded to the South Carolina State Firefighters’ Association annually for recruitment and retention programs but adds that the amount may not exceed the amount awarded in the Fiscal Year 2020-2021.

**Section 2, § 38-7-20(B)(2)** is amended to provide that 4% (instead of 1%) must be transferred to the V-SAFE program; however, when the General Assembly provides less appropriations than what was provided in the previous year to at least one-half of the state agencies or departments contained in the General Appropriations Act in a year in which across the board cuts are made to state agencies and departments, no further transfers of these funds may be made to the V-SAFE program for that year.

**Section 3, § 12-37-935(B)** is amended to provide that 1% of the reimbursement amount credited to the Trust Fund for Tax Relief must be credited to the V-SAFE program.

**Section 3, § 11-11-150(A)(3)** is amended to include such amounts must go to the V-SAFE program from the manufacturer’s additional depreciation under § 12-37-935(B).

**Committee Amendment Summary:**

* Reinstates the 50% volunteer requirement in current law because increasing the number reduces the number of fire departments eligible to receive V-SAFE grants.
* Removes mention of “chartered” fire departments, but retains the current definition to determine which fire departments are eligible for V-SAFE grants.
* Allows the OSF to retain up to 3% of the V-SAFE funds for administration of the grant program
* Allows eligible fire departments to get a grant every year instead of every three years.
* Gives the OSF the authority to receive and distribute all V-SAFE funds
* Requires the OSF to determine the total annual maximum amount each fire department may receive so that the fire departments will know for how much they are eligible apply. The OSF will use the total amount of funding divided by the number of eligible fire departments
* Gives the OSF the ability to carry forward any unused grant funds
* Strikes most of F(3), which makes the application process for the fire departments easier.
* Requires fire departments to report back to the OSF with an accounting of all monies spent and makes the grant for next year contingent upon a proper accounting in the current year.