

McGuire pushing for hundreds of new firefighters

December 18, 2021



State Sen. Mike McGuire and other state legislators announced their intent to pursue a non-partisan bill that would add 1,124 firefighters to CalFire's ranks, preferably before next year's fire season.

"I want to be candid, California is facing a firefighter shortage and we can't wait another year to fix it," said McGuire on Dec. 10 from the steps of the state's capitol.

The bill calls for the state to spend up to \$214 million for the immediate hiring of 1,124 firefighters, which would include 356 full-time firefighters and 768 seasonal hand-crew personnel.

The bill is slated to be introduced in early 2022, and would further mandate that there be at least three firefighters per engine, plus a year-long study to determine staffing needs over the long term. Once completed, the report would be forwarded to the state governor and legislature.

“Fixing the Calfire firefighter shortage will help make sure we can fight these wildfires and protect the communities that we all call home,” said McGuire.

McGuire, who represents the North Coast region, including Del Norte County, was joined by State Senators Shannon Grove and Brian Dahle, as well as the president of Calfire Local 2881 - Tim Edwards.

According to Edwards, Calfire Local 2881 includes 7,200 personnel.

“That may sound like a big number, but we protect anywhere from Oregon to Mexico from the Pacific to Nevada borders,” Edwards said, adding that the geographic reach totals 33 million acres.

Over the last two years, California has faced unprecedented wildfires. In 2021 there were 8,619 fire incidents and 2,569,009 acres burned, according to Calfire. The length of the fire season has also increased by 75 days across the Sierras, which in turn is impacting firefighters working hours and mental health.

“What I’m about to say no firefighter wants to talk about,” McGuire said. “Firefighters are working long overtime hours and many times they are working up to 40 days in a row without a single day off.”

McGuire also reported that over the last four years, 54,000 calls to state mental health hotlines have been placed by firefighters.

“Calfire firefighters have dedicated their lives to keep us safe, and now we as a state need to step up and keep them safe,” McGuire said.