

HB 1353

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 1353

(Delegate James, *et al.*)

Appropriations

Budget and Taxation

Consolidation of State Forest and Park Rangers and Natural Resources Police

This emergency bill mandates that in the consolidation of the Natural Resources Police (NRP) and the State Forest and Park Service (SFPS) rangers, all employees commissioned as law enforcement officers (LEOs) will retain their commission and certification for the duration of their employment with SFPS or any successor organization. Furthermore, the bill directs that the classification title of law enforcement positions at or above the rank of sergeant will reflect the status of the position as an LEO. The bill specifies that an SFPS LEO is eligible and must be considered for any promotional opportunities within SFPS. However, an SFPS LEO who wishes to apply for an NRP position must comply with NRP hiring requirements.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Confirming the status of certain employees as police officers and preserving those officers' law enforcement commissions would not materially impact State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: NRP is responsible for enforcing a variety of State natural resources laws related to boating, hunting, fishing, pollution, and wildlife. Its duties range from boat inspections and issuance of boating certificates to hydrographic surveys, patrols of submerged aquatic vegetation, and hunter safety education. SFPS rangers are responsible for law enforcement activities in the State's parks, forests, and other public lands.

Background: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has two police forces, NRP and the SFPS rangers. In December 2003, the Governor's Commission on Structure and Efficiency of State Government (the Mandel Commission), in its final report, recommended that the law enforcement functions of SFPS and NRP be consolidated. On March 25, 2004, the State signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State Law Enforcement Officers' Labor Alliance to merge the SFPS rangers into NRP and reclassify the rangers in corresponding NRP classifications. Pursuant to the MOU, the consolidation became effective January 1, 2005 and will be fully implemented by January 1, 2006.

Under the MOU, all sworn law enforcement employees whose positions are regularly classified as Ranger II, Park Service Specialist, Park Service Supervisor, and Park Ranger Supervisor, a total of 108 positions, would be transferred and assigned to NRP. According to DNR, as of March 14, 2005, 47 LEOs (39 ranger managers and 8 sergeants) will remain with SFPS and will continue to perform professional park management and certain LEO responsibilities. DNR advises that it plans to fill several civilian vacancies to complement the current SFPS civilian work force to take on the non-LEO functions currently performed by the rangers. Converting the SFPS workforce to a completely civilian status will only occur through attrition, as supervisory SFPS rangers vacate their positions.

The *2004 Joint Chairmen's Report* requested a report from DNR and the Department of Budget and Management describing the process, timeline, and potential cost savings from the merger. On October 1, 2004, DNR submitted the requested report, noting that the merger is anticipated to result in a decrease in both personnel and operating expenditures once fully implemented (in SFPS, it will cost an estimated 40% less to hire civilian personnel rather than LEOs).

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None designated, although SB 383 is substantially similar.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Department of Budget and Management, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 23, 2005
mll/ljm Revised - House Third Reader - April 11, 2005
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