

TCFP Legislative Appropriation Exceptional Request

The Texas Commission on Fire Protection respectfully submits for consideration its FY2026-27 Legislative Appropriations Request and seven exceptional items which total \$1,651,577.61 in increased appropriations. The commission is fully committed to careful and prudent stewardship of the funds provided for its operations and adheres to the statewide philosophy that all agencies are to be efficient and accountable. The commission has prepared its LAR in accordance with the instructions issued by the Governor's Office and Legislative Budget Board.

Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP) is extremely grateful for the increased funding during the 88th legislative session. The salary adjustments for existing staff, the five additional FTE positions and the fleet of vehicles for our field staff have allowed for significant enhancements to our overall operations. Since 2020, we have experienced substantial growth in the career fire service. The number of certified firefighters have increased from 32,000 in 2019 to almost 40,000 in 2024. Additionally, there have been an increase of regulated fire departments and fire training facilities. In 2020, we had just over 900 regulated entities while in 2024 we have exceeded 1,300 regulated entities.

Another area of significant increases has been the number of burn injuries for firefighters and the number of complaints against fire departments and training facilities. These two situations require investigations as outlined in Texas Government Code 419. The additional FTE we added to our Compliance Division in FY23, has been assigned as the full time Investigator. He is currently handling more than 30 active investigations. The challenge is that One investigator is unable to keep up with all the investigations that are required.

In addition, there is a looming concern that as the TCFP continues to grow, in response to the demand, we are facing some serious budgetary issues. Current legislation requires that our agency generate revenue that equals our General Appropriations (GA) plus an additional \$1.5 million. Our current fee structure was significantly increased to ensure we could comply with this mandate. The certification fees we charge are significantly higher than other state regulatory agency fees. Recent changes now require that any fee increases/decreases must be offset with subsequent decreases/increases that match the forementioned fee change.

The concern is that as we continue to grow and increase our GA, we will not be able to meet the revenue requirements. While we support the self-funded model, the fire service industry in Texas is growing at a rapid pace. Our ability to ensure the appropriate regulation required by law, is hampered by a lack of resources and the revenue requirements. We respectfully request re-evaluation of this requirement to allow for the agency growth that is needed.

Exceptional Request One (1) – Seven (7) Compliance FTE positions

This is a request for \$424,000.00 to enable the agency to hire seven (7) new FTE positions to assist with managing the continually increasing workload in the Compliance Division. The request is for one Division Supervisor for the Compliance Section and one Division Supervisor for the Investigations Section, to oversee the work of the assigned FTEs and to assist as needed. In addition, three New FTE positions for the new Investigations Division. Likewise, there is a need for two Clerical Asst. FTE's to assist with the documentation that will occur in each division.

This Compliance Division is currently staffed with nine FTEs. This Division is responsible for the annual Compliance inspections of over 1,700 regulated fire service entities. Due to the size of the State of Texas, there are currently seven (7) TCFP regions with one Compliance Officer per

region and one “at large” Compliance Officer dedicated to Injury and complaint investigations. All are managed by one Division Chief. In addition, this Division is required to conduct training facility audits, injury investigations, complaint investigations and assisting with the coordination of TIFMAS resources during large scale disasters across the state.

The growth of regulated fire departments coupled with the number of injury and complaint investigations we are experiencing has made it apparent that we need to separate the Compliance Inspections and investigations into two separate divisions and increase the number of FTE positions allocated to both Compliance & Investigations.

Our annual Injury report has revealed an increase in Firefighter injures, in particular, burn injuries.

2020 – 6,406 total injuries with 96 being burns.

2023 – 4,613 total injures with 142 being burns.

Currently, 31% of the Compliance Division Chief’s workload is contributed to clerical duties such as approving trips & reviewing vouchers, reviewing injury reports, determining criteria for investigations and assigning to field staff, reviewing complaints and assigning investigations to field staff. Maintaining data related to activities.

Exceptional Request Two (2) – Three (3) Testing & Certification FTE positions

This is a request for \$180,000.00 to enable the agency to hire three (3) new FTE positions in the Testing & Certification Divisions.

Since 2020, We have accomplished transitioning our exam administration to 95% On-Line which has allowed us to focus on areas other than exam delivery across the state. The current staff continues to manage all aspects certification exams, including printing, grading, correlation, and question challenges. At the same time, Testing is responsible for On-Line Training Facility audits and Record Reviews to determine reciprocity from other states. There is a need to add two FTEs to assist with On-Line Training Facility Audits, exam grading and Record Reviews.

We currently administer 15 fire service certifications and have begun the process of adding the responsibility of administering the Emergency Manager certifications for TDEM and allowing certification reciprocity with an estimated 25,000 volunteer firefighters. Combined, we anticipate an increased in workload and demand on our Certification staff. These additional functions will serve to increase the workload of our Certification Division. One additional Certification FTE position is needed to manage these additional responsibilities.

Exceptional Request Three (3) - One (1) IT Programmer FTE position

This is a request for \$63,000.00 to enable the agency to hire one (1) Programmer III for the Information Technology Division.

Our Information Technology Division is responsible for all TCFP systems. This includes our On-Line exam system. As our customer base continues to grow, the demand for technology upgrades, system security and intervention increases. There is enough daily work which keeps the five current FTEs busy, but we do not have adequate staff to focus on development and implementation of new programs and system upgrades at the pace required. One additional FTE would enable IT to focus on these tasks and expedite the implementation of changes and upgrades much quicker.

Exceptional Request Four (4) – FTE Classification Increases

This is a request for \$210,428.00 to enable the agency to re-classify the current 31 Non-Exempt FTE positions.

The increase provided during the 88th Legislative session was greatly appreciated. For the first time in over 25 years, the number of FTEs at the agency increased by five (5). At the same time, the number of regulated entities and certified firefighters has continued to increase. With the increases in regulated entities and certified firefighters, comes an increase in injury investigations, compliance inspections, certification exams, complaint investigations, clerical work and technology needs. It has become extremely difficult for staff to keep up with the workload so to ensure the retention of existing staff. I believe these re-classifications and salary increases are necessary to retain the current staff.

Exceptional Request Five (5) - Purchase eight (8) vehicles

This is a request for \$600,000.00 for the purchase of eight vehicles. Three vehicles will be needed to replace the three vehicles with the highest mileage while purchasing five new vehicles for additional staff (See Exceptional Request # 1).

Our Compliance Officers travel daily to conduct inspections, investigations, audits, and meetings. TCFP was allocated 12 vehicles during the 88th Legislative session. Nine of those vehicles were received and placed in-service in December of 2023. The three remaining have not been received. Based on current estimates, three of the original nine vehicles will have greater than 150,000 miles by early 2027 and will need replacement.

The five additional vehicles would be needed for the additional FTE positions for our Investigations staff. We have experienced an increase in injury and complaint investigations since 2021. Currently, one of the eight Compliance Officers is dedicated strictly to investigations. However, additional Compliance Officers are temporarily assigned to assist as needed, taking them away from the required Compliance inspections and training facility audits.

Exceptional Request Six (6) - \$160,000 for Technology equipment upgrades.

This is a request for \$160,000.00 to enable the agency to upgrade existing IT Equipment.

As our reliance on technology continues to increase, so does the need for updated equipment and technology improvements in our office. \$28,000.00 is needed to update our Commission meeting room to allow for virtual meetings. Currently, we do not have the AV equipment required to facilitate virtual attendance by the public or Commissioners. At the same time, we currently use a sound system that is over 25 years old and is not compatible with video or recording.

The remaining \$137,000.00 would be used for IT upgrades. New computers, replacement computers, replacement monitors, increased Cloud storage space, new Apps, copiers and printers, Network Security and IT Training and Development.

Exceptional Request Seven (7) - \$45,000.00 for Library Resource Updates

The request is for \$45,000.00 to purchase resource material to re-stock our educational library for the Texas Fire Service.

The current library is outdated and many of the resources have been removed simply because they are over 30 years old. The funds would be used to purchase new material that would then be available for checkout by firefighters and fire departments throughout Texas.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Wisko

Agency Chief

Commissioners:

J. P. Steelman, 2017-2023, Longview, Presiding Officer

Michael Glynn, 2021-2027, Roanoke

Bob Morgan, 2017-2023, Fort Worth

Sue De Villez, 2019-2025, Georgetown

Paul Hamilton, 2019-2025, Amarillo

Kelly Vandygriff, 2019-2025, Abernathy

Brandon Wade, 2019-2025, Corpus Christi

Amanda Friedeck, 2023-2028, Alice

Chris Cantu, 2021-2027, Round Rock

David Coatney, 2021-2027, College Station

Tim Smith, 2021-2027, West Carlisse

Daniel Buford, 2024-2029, Bryan