

HOUSE BILL 620

By Turner M

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4;
Title 5; Title 6 and Title 7, relative to adequate fire
station facilities.

WHEREAS, most of the fire stations in use today were planned and built with a single-sex workforce in mind; and

WHEREAS, many of these buildings are now being used by a workforce that includes both women and men; and

WHEREAS, not surprisingly, this can result in inadequacies that are a source of inconvenience, discomfort, embarrassment, and friction for all concerned; and

WHEREAS, many fire departments have developed a variety of solutions to problems created by inadequate facilities, some of which are unsatisfactory and ineffective; and

WHEREAS, most fire stations must be upgraded to meet the needs of today's modern firefighting force; and

WHEREAS, firefighting is an extremely stressful profession and firefighters tend to work long hours; and

WHEREAS, under such stressful conditions harmony among all firefighters representing all walks of life, gender and race is exceptionally important to the effectiveness of the unit in the performance of their jobs; and

WHEREAS, every effort should be made to take into consideration the emotions and sentiments of both genders when making needed station up-grades; under no circumstances should the rights and privileges currently granted to either gender by a fire company or department be reduced or eliminated when up-grades are made; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 24, is amended by adding Sections 2 through 5 of this act as a new part.

SECTION 2. All fire stations constructed after the effective date of this part shall have separate restroom facilities, showers and locker rooms for men and women.

SECTION 3.

(a) Each municipal or county fire department, and each volunteer fire department or company, shall by January 1, 2008, develop and file a plan to convert existing fire stations to gender-friendly facilities with the commission on firefighting personnel standards and education created pursuant to § 4-24-101(a), hereafter referred to as the commission.

(b) Such plans shall identify which stations can be upgraded with new construction to accomplish a gender-friendly facility and the projected time and cost of the construction.

(c) Such plans shall also identify which stations cannot be made gender-friendly through new construction due to space constraints, historical significance of the station, or other documented reasons why this could not be accomplished and shall apply for and seek a waiver from the construction requirement. The commission must approve each such waiver.

SECTION 4. Existing facilities which cannot be upgraded to gender-friendly stations through construction pursuant to Section 3 must be made gender-friendly to the extent possible by:

- (1) Using empty or unused rooms in the station;
- (2) Changing the designation of any existing room including but not limited to weight rooms, T.V. rooms, or other rooms utilized by the firefighters for relaxation or rest;
- (3) With regard to restrooms, shower rooms or locker rooms, using a

male/female flip sign with locks on the door when the room is being utilized by either a male or female; no restroom, shower room or locker room which is designated specifically for male or female may be used at anytime by the opposite sex; and

(4) With respect to sleeping arrangements, if it is not possible to have separate sleeping facilities for each gender, privacy for everyone shall be provided by installing individual cubicles with a curtain or screen blocking the entrance. Each such cubicle shall contain at least a bed, desk, lamp and a sufficient number of lockers to provide each firefighter on a shift a designated, private area to rest or sleep.

SECTION 5. Failure to file such plan as required in this part or to timely complete the required changes in the manner provided in the plan may result in the loss of state shared taxes with respect to municipalities and counties, in an amount to be determined by the commissioner of finance and administration, and loss or suspension of the charter of a volunteer fire company as determined by the state fire marshal after providing a hearing in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.