



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Government Operations
Gabriela Coletta, Chair

One City Hall Square ♦ 5th Floor ♦ Boston, MA 02201 ♦ Phone: (617) 635-3040 ♦ Fax: (617) 635-4203

REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

May 1, 2024

Dear Councilors,

Docket #0582, Home Rule Petition For A Special Law Re: An Act to Amend the Training Requirement For the Fire Department Cadet Program in Boston.

This matter was sponsored by Councilors Worrell, Fernandes Anderson and Louijeune and was referred to the Committee on March 27, 2024.

Summary of Legislation:

Docket #0582, is a Home Rule Petition to amend **Chapter 242 of the Acts of 2020**, An Act Creating A Fire Department Cadet Program In The City Of Boston. The legislative intent of this HRP is to increase the pool of candidates for the Boston Fire Department (BFD) to reach necessary staffing levels. The petition seeks to do so by amending the special law, to reduce the number of years required to serve as a cadet prior to: being terminated from the program for age or appointment to the Department. This HRP reduces the number of years from two (2) to one (1).

Currently, **Section 1 of Chapter 242 of the Acts of 2020** states: “No person shall be too old for appointment as a cadet if the person was of qualifying age at the time of application to a cadet program. An appointment to a cadet program shall not be terminated for age unless the cadet has completed **2 years** of service.” The Home Rule Petition proposes to amend this section to read as “No person shall be too old for appointment as a cadet if the person was of qualifying age at the time of application to a cadet program. An appointment to a cadet program shall not be terminated for age unless the cadet has completed **1 year** of service.”

Further, **Section 2 of Chapter 242 of the Acts of 2020** states “any person who has completed not less than **2 years** of service as a fire cadet under this act may, subject to a program established by the fire commissioner of the city of Boston and approved by the personnel administrator of the human resources division within the executive office for administration and finance, be appointed to fill a vacancy in a position in the lowest grade in the fire force of the city of Boston without certification from an eligible list prepared under said chapter 31.” (Civil Service Law). The Home Rule Petition proposes to amend this section to read as “any person who has completed not less than **1 year** of service as a fire cadet under this act may, subject to a

program established by the fire commissioner of the city of Boston and approved by the personnel administrator of the human resources division within the executive office for administration and finance, be appointed to fill a vacancy in a position in the lowest grade in the fire force of the city of Boston without certification from an eligible list prepared under said chapter 31.”

Information Gathered at the Hearing:

The Committee held a hearing on April 17th, 2024. The Chair was joined by Councilors Louijeune; Flynn; Murphy; FitzGerald; Breadon; Worrell; Fernandes-Anderson; Mejia; and Durkan.

Paul F. Burke, Fire Commissioner and Chief of Boston Fire Department and Michael Gaskins, Diversity Recruitment Officer for the Boston Fire Department, testified on behalf of the Administration. The Committee also heard testimony from Alector Tavares, President of the Boston Vulcans Society; Sam Dillon, President of Local 718; and Leroy Heyward, Vice President of Local 718.

Testimony on behalf of the Administration advocated for the amendment, stating that cadets are ready and qualified after one year. It was stated that amending the special law in the proposed manner would advance quality candidates more quickly, ease financial challenges associated with low salaries for cadets, promote a more diverse workforce, and strengthen the pipeline of Boston residents to the fire department. Testimony on behalf of Boston's Vulcan Society supported the proposed amendment and emphasized the need for alternative pathways to the Fire Department.

Testimony on behalf of Local 718 clarified that they do not oppose the cadet program; however, they expressed hesitancy in supporting an amendment of this kind and emphasized the importance of ensuring that the program is achieving its intended goals and that cadets are receiving adequate training and vetting before becoming firefighters.

In response to safety concerns, Commissioner Burke expressed strong confidence in the readiness and skills of the cadets in the cadet program. It was highlighted that the cadets are well-trained, knowledgeable about the department, and respectful of authority. The Commissioner emphasized that the cadets would be top performers in the fire academy due to their training and experience and are more prepared than new recruits coming from the civil service list because of their extensive exposure to the fire department's operations. It was stated that the cadets are fantastic individuals who reflect positively on the City with their intelligence and ambition and will prove the programs worth.

Councilors expressed support as well as their interest in the proposal and sought clarification on various aspects, including potential benefits of the amendment, the impact the amendment would have on other applicants as well as diversity within the department, and clarification on what the selection process for cadets would be following this amendment. Councilors and panelists discussed the history and basic operations of the Cadet Program. Councilors and panelists also

discussed the Boston Fire Department's adherence to Massachusetts civil service law for hiring practices and how the Cadet Program was established to create an alternative pathway for Boston residents. It was explained that the Fire Cadet Program was created by special law in 2019, aiming to recruit Boston residents aged 18-25, providing on-the-job training and civilian duties at BFD headquarters and firehouses. Further, it was explained that cadets may receive preference for up to 33% of an upcoming fire recruit class after completing the program and that the current salary for cadets is \$32,000 a year for two years. Testimony highlighted the two-year commitment as a potential barrier to retaining cadets, who might seek other opportunities due to the low pay.

Recommended Action:

The Chair of the Committee on Government Operations, to which the following was referred:

Docket #0582, Home Rule Petition For A Special Law Re: An Act to Amend the Training Requirement For the Fire Department Cadet Program in Boston,

submits a report recommending that this docket **ought to pass**.



Gabriela Coletta, Chair
Committee on Government Operations