

Response to Questions on the FY 2010 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Supervisor McKay

Question: Please provide information on the success of the wellness program including how much savings in workers compensation may have been achieved.

Please provide information on the success of the alternative placement program and the savings as a result of that program.

Response: Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is one of ten jurisdictions participating in the Wellness-Fitness Initiative dedicated to developing a holistic, educational approach to wellness and fitness programs in the fire service. The goal of this initiative is to improve the quality of life for fire fighters through the investment of wellness resources. A fit, healthy, and capable fire fighter more effectively performs required job duties resulting in decreased lost work time, workers compensation and disability. Components of the wellness program include medical screening for candidates, injury evaluation, behavioral health, fitness and data collection.

To illustrate the impact of this successful wellness-fitness initiative program, FRD worked closely with the Risk Management Division to track data pertaining to lost time and workers compensation relating to the Fire and Rescue Training Academy. Since implementation of a new physical fitness program by the Peer Fitness Coordinator, the Training Academy has seen a 49% reduction, or \$108,829 in savings, in workers compensation costs from calendar year 2007 to 2008. Staff is continuing to develop performance measures in order to further quantify the impact of this program.

The Alternative Placement program was implemented in July 1997 to provide an alternative to disability retirement for uniformed Fire and Rescue employees injured on-the-job. Individuals meeting the criteria for service-connected disability retirement were placed on permanent retirement at 66.23% of their salary prior to 1996. In 1996 the service-connected disability retirement benefit was reduced from 66.23% to 40% and a severe disability benefit of 90% of salary was added because the system was experiencing a high number of disability retirements. In conjunction with this change to reduce the number of disability retirements, the Alternative Placement Program was implemented. The Alternative Placement Program gives uniformed employees the option to continue working in alternative placement positions until reaching normal retirement eligibility. Since implementation, 22 individuals have been placed in Alternative Placement positions in lieu of opting for disability retirement. Had these individuals not had the Alternative Placement option, they would have received disability retirement benefits, paid from the Uniformed Retirement System, and Workers Compensation, paid from Fund 501, County Insurance Fund. (It should be noted that the County Insurance Fund is primarily supported by the General Fund.) Since its inception, it is estimated that the Alternative Placement program has resulted in cost avoidance of \$8.1 million in Workers Compensation payments.