

TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE

First Regular

SESSION, 2025

S. B. No. 24-05

A BILL FOR AN ACT

To establish a Fire Reserve Corps to assist the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services (DFEMS) and the Commonwealth Ports Authority-Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (CPA-ARFF) in fire prevention and suppression, rescue operations, basic and advanced life support; and for other purposes.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS
COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

1 **Section 1. Findings and Purpose.** The Legislature further finds that first
2 responders risk their lives daily in order to protect all life, property, and the environment;
3 endure lengthy hours in high-pressured and dangerous situations, and ensure that peace and
4 tranquility are maintained despite the lack of manpower, training, equipment, and sufficient
5 financial resources to adequately perform its mission. With society and the population
6 continuing to grow, so does the request and the demand for public services.

7 In continuing its efforts, CNMI DFEMS is committed to the highest standards in
8 order to protect the lives and property of the people of the Commonwealth from fires,
9 natural disasters, and hazardous material incidents, and in providing emergency medical
10 services, fire prevention, and fire suppression, and conducting educational programs to its
11 personnel and the community. The Legislature finds the need to establish the following:
12 (1) CNMI Fire and Emergency Medical Services Reserve Corps shall be hereinafter
13 referred to as the “CNMI Fire Reserve Corps” or the “CNMI FRC”; and (2) CNMI DFEMS
14 and CPA-ARFF shall attain and maintain accreditation by the Commission on Fire
15 Accreditation International and Commission on Professional Credentialing, Commission
16 on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs and Committee on Accreditation of
17 Educational Programs for the Emergency Medical Services Professions, and the
18 Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services.

Therefore, the purpose of this Act is to establish a volunteer-based CNMI Fire Reserve Corps ("CNMI FRC") to assist the CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF in fire prevention and suppression to include wildland, aircraft, and shipboard firefighting, rescue operations to include land and sea rescues, basic and advanced life support in EMS response, and for other purposes.

Section 2. Amendment. Title 1, Division 2, Part 1, Chapter 18, of the Commonwealth Code is hereby amended to add a new Article 8 to read as follows:

"Article 8. NMI Fire Reserve Corps Authorized.

§ 801. CNMI Fire Reserve Corps Established. The Commonwealth authorizes CNMI DFEMS to establish and maintain a CNMI Fire Reserve Corps or "CNMI FRC". This reserve corps shall be authorized to have a sufficient number of reservists as determined reasonably necessary to meet mission requirements. It shall be staffed by citizen volunteers unless funding is otherwise provided, who will assist CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF in fire prevention and suppression, rescue operations, and basic and advanced life support. CNMI DFEMS shall partner with the Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) – Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) Pacific Region ARFF Training Center (PRATC) to obtain and maintain professional firefighter certification through the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications, herein referred to as the "Pro-Board" for the CNMI FRC. This training and certification requirement shall apply to all CNMI DFEMS firefighters and the CNMI FRC.

§ 802. Requirements. CNMI DFEMS Commissioner has overall authority over the CNMI FRC and is responsible to the CNMI Governor for the conduct of the reserve corps. The CNMI DFEMS Commissioner shall appoint or designate an Officer in Charge (OIC) from the Division of Emergency Services to manage the CNMI FRC Program. Reservists will be selected through a comprehensive screening and selection process from a list of qualified applicants who have successfully met minimum requirements through a CNMI FRC Academy through PRATC.

§ 803. Response Authority. FRC personnel shall have response authority after officially being sworn in and only while on official duty.

1 § 804. On-Duty. A reservist will be considered on-duty when the FRC as a whole
2 has been activated, or when he or she has been specifically assigned to a task or duty by
3 the OIC on special assignments or missions, during times of natural disasters or man-made
4 catastrophic events, or to backfill manpower assignments during extreme shortage or
5 unavailability of personnel. A reservist will also be considered on-duty when performing
6 firefighting or EMS duties, ride-along for skill maintenance and sustainment, attending
7 training to fulfill recertification requirements.

8 § 805. Compensation. Reservists may be compensated during times of declared
9 disasters by the US and/or CNMI governments when performing official duties and at any
10 time should funding be made available through federal grants or through local
11 appropriations.

12 § 806. Reservist Rules. CNMI FRC personnel shall be subject to all lawful rules
13 and regulations as may be promulgated by the CNMI DFEMS Commissioner and adhere
14 to standard operating procedures, protocols, policies, and directives as established by the
15 CNMI FRC program.

16 § 807. Dismissal. CNMI FRC personnel may be dismissed from their reserve status
17 by the CNMI DFEMS Commissioner for violating any law, rule, or regulation. The OIC
18 may suspend a reservist from duty status pending final review by the CNMI DFEMS
19 Commissioner for allegations of misconduct that may lead to removal from the reserve
20 corps program.

21 § 808. Equipment Issue. CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF shall provide necessary
22 uniforms, personal protective equipment, response equipment, and supplies for the
23 reservists.

24 § 809. Priority Placement Program. CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF shall work
25 with the CNMI Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to establish a priority placement
26 hiring program for CNMI DFEMS reservists.

27 § 810. Employment of Reserve Firefighters. Any government agency,
28 instrumentality, or independent program in the Commonwealth, or as defined under 29
29 USC § 203(c) and (x) employing the reserve firefighters, including those covered under §

203(y), shall comply with 29 CFR § 553.230 which relates to maximum hours for work periods of 7 to 28 days.

§ 811. Emergency Essential Employees. Reserve firefighters shall be considered key and emergency essential employees performing key and emergency essential functions during times of natural or man-made disasters or any catastrophic events.”

Section 3. Amendment. Title 1, Division 2, Part 1, Chapter 18 of the Commonwealth Code is hereby amended to add a new Article 9 to read as follows:

“**Article 9. CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF Accreditation Program Managers.**

§ 901. CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF Accreditation Program Managers: Duties and Responsibilities.

(a) CNMI DFEMS Commissioner shall appoint or designate an Officer-in-Charge (OIC) from the Division of Emergency Medical Services to manage the CNMI DFEMS Accreditation Program. CPA-ARFF Fire Chief shall likewise appoint or designate an Officer-in-Charge (OIC) from the Training and Administration Section to manage the CPA-ARFF Accreditation Program.

(b) CNMI DFEMS and CPA-ARFF Accreditation Program Managers shall be responsible for ensuring that fire department accreditation and firefighter professional credentialing, EMS education accreditation and professional EMS certification, and ambulance services accreditation are obtained and maintained.”

Section 4. Severability. If any provision of this Act or the application of any such provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its provisions to persons or circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid shall not be affected thereby.

Section 5. Savings Clause. This Act and any repealer contained herein shall not be construed as affecting any existing right acquired under contract or acquired under statutes repealed or under any rule, regulation, or order adopted under the statutes. Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding instituted under or pursuant to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have the effect of terminating, or in any way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal, which shall already be in existence on the

1 date this Act becomes effective.

2 **Section 6. Effective Date.** This Act shall take effect upon its approval by the

3 Governor or becoming law without such approval.

Date: 1/22/25

Introduced By: 
Senator Manny Gregory T. Castro

Reviewed for Legal Sufficiency by:


Senate Legal Counsel