

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2023 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 475

By Senators Nelson and Plymale

[Introduced January 25, 2023; referred
to the Committee on Pensions]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §8-22-23a of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating
2 to examinations for disability pensions.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 22. RETIREMENT BENEFITS GENERALLY; POLICEMEN'S PENSION AND
RELIEF FUND; FIREMEN'S PENSION AND RELIEF FUND; PENSION PLANS
FOR EMPLOYEES OF WATERWORKS SYSTEM, SEWERAGE SYSTEM OR
COMBINED WATERWORKS AND SEWERAGE SYSTEM.**

**§8-22-23a. Eligibility for total and temporary disability pensions and total and permanent
disability pensions; reporting; light duty.**

1 (a) All members applying for total and temporary or total and permanent disability benefits
2 after June 30, 1981, shall be examined by at least two physicians under the direction of the staff at
3 Marshall University, West Virginia University, Morgantown, or West Virginia University, Charleston:
4 *Provided*, That if a member's medical condition cannot be agreed on by the two physicians, a third
5 physician shall examine the member: *Provided, however*, That beginning January 1, 2010, and
6 continuing thereafter, a member applying for total and temporary or total and permanent disability
7 benefits shall be examined by two physicians, one of which shall be chosen and paid by the
8 member, and one of which shall be chosen and paid by the oversight board. If the two physicians
9 disagree, the oversight board shall select and pay for a third examining physician: *Provided*
10 *further*, That starting July 1, 2023, and continuing thereafter, the physician(s) chosen by the
11 oversight board to perform the independent medical examination(s) may perform an in-person or
12 virtual examination of a member's physical or mental health, or both, or at the discretion of the
13 oversight board, a medical record review of the member's physical or mental health, or both. The
14 selection of the method of examination is at the discretion of the oversight board in consultation
15 with the physician.

16 (1) Disability benefits shall be awarded if in the opinion of two of the examining physicians

17 the member is by reason of the disability unable to perform adequately the job duties required.

18 (2) Each medical examination shall include the review of the member's medical history, but
19 an examining physician may not have access to the disability examination report or disability
20 recommendation of another physician.

21 (3) The physicians shall send copies of their reports to both the board of trustees of the
22 member's pension and relief fund and the oversight board.

23 (4) The expense of the member's transportation to medical examinations shall be paid by
24 the board of trustees. Medical expense shall not exceed the reasonable and customary charges
25 for similar services.

26 (5) Beginning January 1, 2010, and thereafter, if a member is charged with an offense that
27 has the potential to lead to the member's termination, the member's municipal pensions and relief
28 fund board of trustees may not consider the member's eligibility for disability benefits until after
29 investigation of the charge is completed and any disciplinary decision is implemented.

30 (6) No later than January 1, 2011, and annually thereafter, each board of trustees shall
31 report to the oversight board the total number of disability applications received during the prior
32 fiscal year, the status of each application as of the end of the fiscal year, total applications granted
33 and denied and the percentage of disability-benefit recipients to the total number of active
34 members of the fund.

35 (b) Effective for members becoming eligible for total and temporary disability benefits after
36 June 30, 1981, initially or previously under this subsection allowance for initial or additional total
37 and temporary disability payments, the amount thereof to be determined as specified in section
38 twenty-four of this article shall be paid to the member during the disability for a period not
39 exceeding twenty-six weeks if after a medical examination in accordance with subsection (a) of
40 this section two examining physicians report in writing to the board of trustees that: (1) The
41 member has become so totally, physically or mentally disabled, from any reason, as to render the
42 member totally, physically or mentally, incapacitated for employment as a police officer or

43 firefighter; and (2) it has not been determined if the disability is permanent or it has been
44 determined that the disability may be alleviated or eliminated if the member follows a reasonable
45 medical treatment plan or reasonable medical advice: *Provided*, That, in any event, a member is
46 not eligible for total and temporary disability payments following the fourth consecutive 26-week
47 period of total and temporary disability unless subsequent disability results from a cause unrelated
48 to the cause of the four previous periods of total and temporary disability. During the two-year
49 period of total and temporary disability, the department is required to restore the member to his or
50 her former position in the department at any time the member is determined to no longer be
51 disabled: *Provided, however*, That the department may refill, on a temporary basis, the position
52 vacated by s the member after the first twenty-six weeks of his or her temporary disability.

53 (c) Effective for members becoming eligible for total and permanent disability benefits
54 initially under this subsection or becoming eligible for total and temporary disability benefits under
55 subsection (b) of this section after June 30, 1981, allowance for total and permanent disability
56 payments, the amount thereof to be determined as specified in section twenty-four of this article,
57 shall be paid to the member after a medical examination in accordance with subsection (a) of this
58 section, two examining physicians report in writing to the board of trustees that the member has
59 become so totally, physically or mentally, and permanently disabled, as a proximate result of
60 service rendered in the performance of his or her duties in the department, as to render the
61 member totally, physically or mentally, and permanently incapacitated for employment as a police
62 officer or firefighter or, if the member has been a member of either of the departments for a period
63 of not less than five consecutive years preceding the disability, the member has become so totally,
64 physically or mentally, and permanently disabled, from any reason other than service rendered in
65 the performance of his or her duties in the department, as to render the member totally, physically
66 or mentally, and permanently incapacitated for employment as a police officer or firefighter. The
67 phrase "totally, physically or mentally, and permanently disabled" shall not be construed to include
68 a medical condition which may be corrected if the member follows a reasonable medical treatment

69 plan or reasonable medical advice.

70 (d) Effective for members becoming eligible for total and temporary disability benefits after
71 June 30, 1981, under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, any payments for total and
72 temporary disability for a period during the disability not exceeding twenty-six weeks shall cease at
73 the end of the 26-week period under the following conditions:

74 (1) The member fails to be examined as provided in subsection (a) of this section; or (2) the
75 member is examined or reexamined as provided in said subsection and two examining physicians
76 report to the board of trustees that the member's medical condition does not meet the
77 requirements of subsection (b) or (c) of this section. Effective for members becoming eligible for
78 total and temporary disability benefits after June 30, 1981, under subsection (b) of this section,
79 subsequent to the member's receipt of total and temporary disability payments for a period of two
80 years, the payments shall cease at the end of the two-year period under the following conditions:

81 (A) The member fails to be examined as provided in subsection (a) of this section; or (B) the
82 member is examined or reexamined as provided in said subsection and two examining physicians
83 report to the board of trustees that the member's medical condition does not meet the
84 requirements of subsection (c) of this section.

85 (e) Notwithstanding other provisions of this section to the contrary, a member of a
86 municipal policemen's or firemen's pension and relief fund who is found to be disabled from
87 performing the full range of tasks relevant to police officer or firefighter employment but capable of
88 performing a restricted or light-duty police officer or firefighter job made available at the discretion
89 of the employing municipality may choose to continue working and retain an active membership in
90 his or her pension and relief fund.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill to modify examinations for the purpose of determining disability pensions.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.