

Florida Firefighter Staffing

Vacancies • Workforce Pressure • Training & Academy Pipeline

Charlotte County Board Workshop



January 20, 2026

What the statewide data is saying

Vacancies

1,469

Positions budgeted but unfilled (snapshot as of 2/1/2023).

Planned growth

3,961

New FF FTEs departments said they need over the next five years.

Retirement eligibility

2,490

In DROP or within five years of retirement (replacement demand).

A key constraint: EMS qualifications

Departments reported that 3,850 (71%) of needed FTEs would have to be Paramedics.

Interpretation for decision-makers:

Recruiting plans need to cover (1) today's vacancies, (2) planned service expansion, and (3) attrition from retirements.

Planning estimate (range) using the most recent statewide vacancy baseline

Working estimate (Dec 2025)

~2,500

Statewide vacancies (planning range): ~2,000–3,000
(Not an official monthly statewide vacancy report.)

Scenario range (illustrative)

5.0% vacancy rate	~1,900
6.5% vacancy rate	~2,450
8.0% vacancy rate	~3,000

Why vacancy pressure likely remains elevated in 2026

Baseline: FFCA/State Fire Marshal survey reported 1,469 firefighter FTE vacancies as of 2/1/2023 (~5% of budgeted positions in the sample).

2025 schedule compression adds demand: policy direction encourages limiting normally scheduled shifts to ~42 hours/week; this increases authorized staffing to hold minimums.

Kelly days and related fatigue initiatives are expanding in negotiations, increasing authorized positions even where call volume is stable.

Simple staffing math: moving from a 56-hour to a 42-hour standard workweek increases base staffing per 24/7 seat by ~33% (before leave/training relief).

Kelly days + 42-hour workweek trend (2025)

Kelly day expansions

Reducing annual hours per firefighter (via added Kelly shifts) requires additional FTE to maintain minimum daily staffing.

42-hour schedules

HB 929 (effective July 1, 2025) directs rulemaking to encourage schedules where standard shifts do not exceed 42 hours/week—aimed at burnout reduction but increases staffing cost.

What it means in staffing math

A 24/7 staffed seat requires 8,760 hours/year. Base staffing per seat:

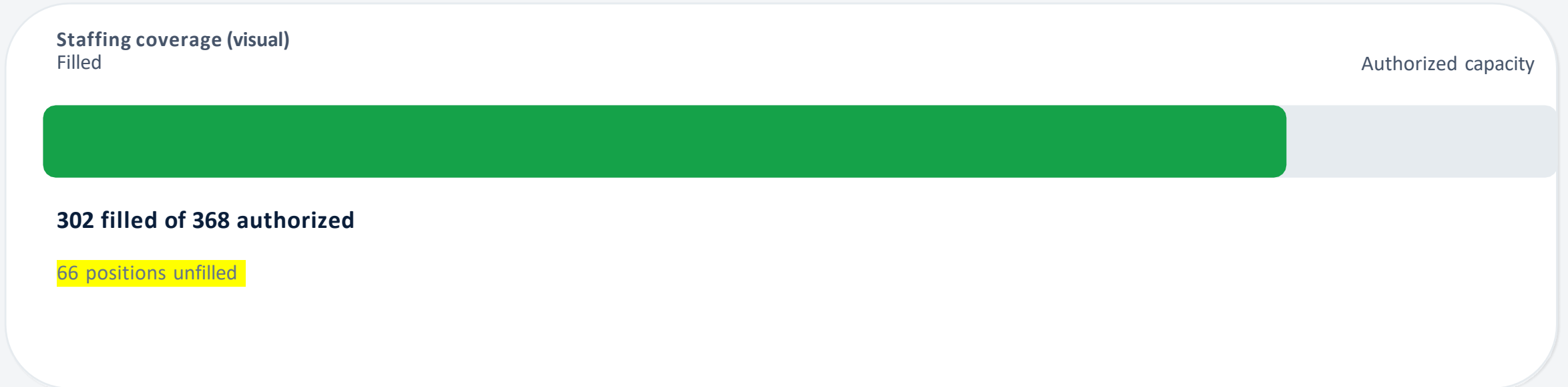
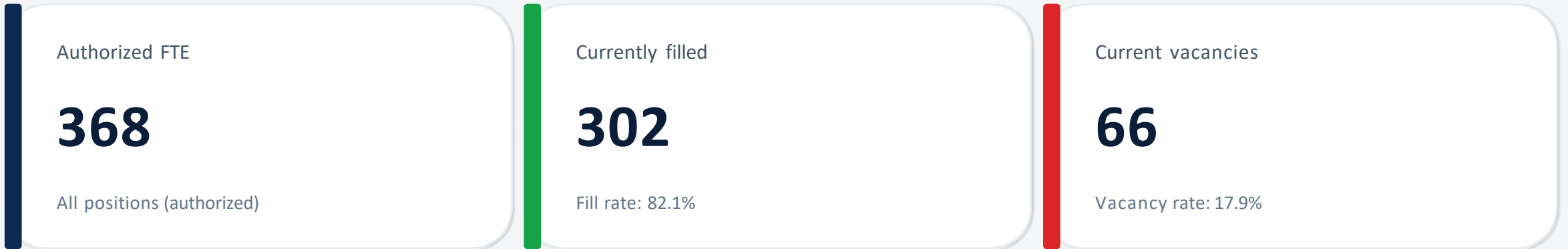
- 56-hr week: $8,760 \div 2,912 \approx 3.0$ FTE
- 42-hr week: $8,760 \div 2,184 \approx 4.0$ FTE ($\approx +33\%$)

Then add leave/training relief.

Takeaway

Vacancies are only the starting point. If workweeks shorten statewide, authorized staffing needs rise—so recruitment, academy pipeline, and funding models must scale accordingly.

Authorized vs. filled positions



How firefighters are “created” in Florida

1

Minimum Standards Course

Firefighter I & II curriculum = 492 hours (Parts I & II)
4-6 months depending on school training schedule, full or part time

2

State exams / compliance

Written + practical exams → Letter/Certificate (BFST) 1-2 months.

3

Hiring + local onboarding

Department hiring process, recruit school, field training 4 – 5 weeks hiring model, two-month orientation and two-month ride time before released

4

EMS pathway (required)

Many agencies prioritize EMT/Paramedic; statewide survey indicates 71% of needed FTEs require Paramedic.
EMT school 2-5 months depending on school training schedule.

Indicators from BFST Council meeting minutes

FFII certifications issued (snapshots)

1,909

FFII issued YTD 2023

11/16/2023 minutes

1,100

FFII issued YTD 2024

07/22/2024 minutes

752

FFII issued YTD 2025

04/29/2025 minutes

Note: "YTD" periods differ by meeting date; use as directional pipeline indicators, not apples-to-apples annual totals.

Other pipeline and workforce indicators

- Current employed firefighters: 39,461 (BFST stats, 07/22/2024 minutes).
- Certified Firefighter II: 47,834 (BFST stats, 07/22/2024 minutes).
- Students trained at FSFC YTD 2023: 3,220 (11/16/2023 minutes).
- Students "on campus" (YTD 2024): 1,578 (07/22/2024 minutes).
- Students June 2024–Apr 2025: 2,481; 161 classes; 128,160 contact hours (04/29/2025 minutes).

Common constraints identified statewide

Training capacity and logistics

Departments reported limits on how many can be hired at once due to training staff, schedules, and logistical capacity. (We hire from 10-20 in each recruit class.)

Candidate screening and readiness

Multiple agencies noted challenges finding candidates who meet testing, background, and physical standards. (Difficulty in completing State Testing)

Paramedic supply

Statewide survey indicates most “needed” new hires are expected to be Paramedics—tightening the labor market. (We have a four-year contract agreement.)

Inter-agency competition

Survey remarks described hiring dynamics where departments recruit from each other (“cannibalism”), shifting costs rather than adding net workforce. (Turnover due to contracts and retention issues)

Actions that directly increase hiring “throughput”

Pipeline & training capacity

- Sponsor Minimum Standards seats locally (guarantee class capacity). **Civilian to Certified program**
- Cadet/apprenticeship pathway: hire non-certified candidates, pay during EMT → Fire school progression.
- Expand paramedic pipeline (tuition sponsorship + payback agreements; internal cohorts). **CTC, FSW Gulfcoast, SCTI and MCTI**
- Recruit school cadence: schedule predictable classes to absorb cohorts of hires. **Four established hiring classes.**

Recruiting & retention

- Lateral transfer program with step placement + fast onboarding. Contractual requirements.
- Retention package: targeted incentives for paramedics and high-demand specialties.
- Reduce time-to-hire: streamline testing, backgrounds, and conditional offers.
- Partnerships with training directors / academies for direct-to-hire pipelines.

Benefit of a County-based Fire Academy (local pipeline)

Workforce development outcomes

- Grows a “homegrown” candidate pool (high school recruitment + residency-targeted academies).
- Reduces travel and scheduling barriers—especially for working adults (night/weekend cohorts).
- Creates a predictable pathway from EMT → Firefighter → Paramedic over time.
- Can leverage state scholarships and sponsorship models to lower trainee cost.

Operational & Fiscal Outcomes

- Improves hiring “throughput” by producing cohorts on a scheduled cadence.
- Shortens time-to-fill vacancies → reduces backfill pressure and mandatory OT.
- Standardizes recruit onboarding and field readiness across the organization.
- Strengthens community resilience by keeping training—and talent—locally.

What a Charlotte County academy could look like

Implementation options (practical pathways)

- Partnership model: guarantee Minimum Standards seats through Charlotte Technical College; align county recruit school + field training to the graduation calendar.
- County-sponsored cadet model: hire non-certified candidates, sponsor training, and direct pipeline hiring them through EMT → Fire I/II (reduces up-front barriers).
- Use the County Public Safety Training Center for recruit onboarding, hands-on skills, and continuing education; pursue BFST training provider approval if a stand-alone academy is approved.

Example planning targets (illustrative)

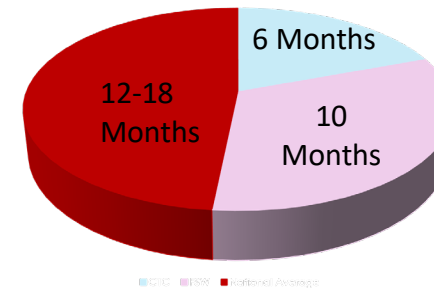
- Current gap: 66 vacancies (368 authorized, 302 filled).
- If the goal is to close the gap in ~24 months (ignoring attrition), average net hires needed $\approx 33/\text{year}$.
- Two cohorts/year $\times 24$ students = 48 trainees/year; at 70% hire yield $\rightarrow \sim 34$ hires/year.
- Track metrics: applicants per posting, academy completion, hire conversion, time-to-fill, 24-month retention.

What Charlotte County Fire-EMS Public Safety Training Institute could look like

Fire Academy Options (practical pathways)

- Partnership model: guarantee Minimum Standards seats through Charlotte Technical College; align county recruit school + field training to the graduation calendar.
- County-sponsored cadet model: hire non-certified candidates, sponsor training, and pipeline them through EMT → Fire I/II (reduces up-front barriers).
- Charlotte County Fire Academy: hire non-certified candidates, pipeline them through EMT and fire school.
 - This would eliminate our current 8-week orientation program thus filling FE spots sooner.

Paramedic Program



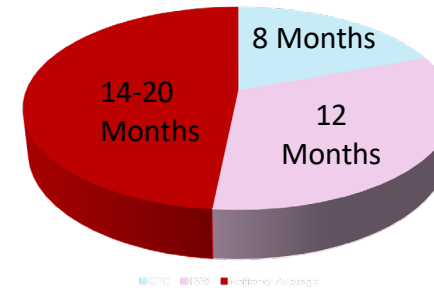
- National Average
- FSW
- CTC

What Charlotte County Fire-EMS Public Safety Training Institute could look like

Credentialing Process

- CCFEMS credentialing:
 - 40hr ALS orientation class (two months)
 - 24 shifts (576 hours) field training
- 40-hour paramedic program:
 - Cutting the time from start of paramedic school to credentialed paramedic by 40%-50%

Paramedic Program Till Credentialed with CCFEMS



- National Average
- FSW
- CTC

Fla. Admin. Code Ann. R. 69A-37.060 Certification

- Fixed Structure not less than 2 stories in height
 - Each floor not less than 400sq (exclusive of hallways, stairways, balconies, or vestibule areas, of masonry, reinforced concrete construction, or both, or other fire resistive material as approved by Bureau of Fire Standards and training
 - All floors shall have window openings with still height at least 42 inches above the top of the finished floor
 - No window openings shall be allowed in the walls containing the interior stairway
 - Structure shall have an interior enclosed stairway connecting all floors and roof
 - Double handrails on stairways and guard rails around stair wells should be provided
 - An exterior stairway of metal or masonry construction shall be provided, extending from first floor level, connecting all floors above the first floor
 - In lieu of an exterior stairway the structure shall be provided with an enclosed stairway designed to discharge directly to the outside at the first-floor level, with access from each floor above the first floor provided by means of an open-air vestibule or by way of an exterior balcony
- At roof level, the entire perimeter of the roof shall be provided with a guard rail or parapet wall or a combination of parapet wall and guard rail and not less than 42 inches high measured vertically to the top of the wall or rail from the finished surface
 - All floors shall be equipped with a standpipe outlet located in the stairway enclosure
 - Outlets shall be designed to supply 2 ½ inch hose with water flow controlled by a hose valve
 - A fire department standpipe connection shall be provided on an exterior first floor wall
 - An enclosed structure for simulated structural firefighting, minimum of 400 square feet, having at least two rooms
 - Liquefied petroleum or natural gas firefighting
 - A liquefied petroleum gas field must be available with a 250-gallon LP storage tank complete with a shut off valve and safety valve
 - There must be a vapor line with cut-off valve, liquid line and cut-off valve
 - There shall be a permanent installation so it can be set on fire and the students using handlines can approach the burn and tanks, and shut off proper valves

Current Training Tower Deficiencies

- The current structure lacks the flexibility and configuration to replicate real-world fire ground conditions
- The tower is not compliant with current NFPA 1403 and 1402, minimizing our ability to teach, train, and conduct minimum standards training, and regional training with community partners
- Structural deterioration has led to ongoing safety concerns for instructors and students including:
 - Outward swinging hinges that are in poor condition
 - Open stairways which make standpipe operations difficult, hinder the ability to smoke out different levels, reduces the capability of performing multiple training scenarios on different divisions (floors)
 - The flooring system is inadequate and composed of wood flooring which has deteriorated and created holes in the floors on several levels (repairs are in place)
 - The process to repair the floors is tedious and requires several weeks, which impacts training
- The water drainage system is inadequate and clogs when flowing water in the building. This has created several problems with division one's flooring system and has prevented us from flowing water in the building
- The existing tower design does not support advanced training in fire behavior, especially for search and rescue operations, fire science, overall impacting operational readiness

Planning for a Regional Training Academy

Purpose

- Establish a centralized, state-supported regional training facility to meet growing workforce, public safety, and community development needs.

Why It's Needed

- **Increased Demand:** Current local facilities are over capacity and cannot meet regional training needs.
- **Workforce Development:** Supports skilled workforce pipelines aligned with state and regional economic priorities.
- **Consistency & Quality:** Standardized training improves outcomes, safety, and credentialing across jurisdictions.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Shared regional resources reduce duplication and long-term operational costs.
- **Accessibility:** Reduces travel barriers for rural and underserved communities.

Impact

- Strengthens regional readiness and resilience.
- Supports job creation and retention. Enhances public service delivery and safety.
- Maximizes return on state investment.

Request to State & Local Leaders

- Allocate state funding for planning, construction, and initial operations.
- Champion the project through legislative and budgetary processes.
- Partner with regional stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainability.

Proposed Training Center

- These facilities would exceed NFPA 1402 and 1403 standards allowing us to:
 - Create a regional training complex
 - Conduct minimum standards training and partner with local schools
 - Conduct advanced training in fire ground operations, aerial operations, special operations, search and rescue, live fire training and officer development training
- Features include:
 - Multiple burn rooms on three divisions
 - Hallways and rooms which simulate real world search and rescue efforts
 - Rappelling anchors, confined space modules, standpipe systems, and forcible entry props.
 - Simulated two car garage, which can be used to replicate lithium-ion battery simulated fires in garages, vehicles fires and other scenarios related to real-world scenarios

This design supports full spectrum fireground training, from entry-level firefighter skills to advanced incident command simulations



Safety:

- Increased firefighter safety through improved, realistic training scenarios
- Long-term cost savings through reduced maintenance and energy efficiency
- Clean building, utilization of Class B fires only which creates a clean environment interior and exterior crew during live fire training:
 - Allow precise control of flame size, heat output, and burn duration
 - Instructors can start, stop, and modulate fires remotely in real time
 - Reduces the risk of uncontrolled flashovers or rapid-fire growth common in Class A burns
 - Class B burns produce cleaner combustion with fewer particulates and toxic gases
 - Firefighters are less exposed to carcinogens, CO, and smoke inhalation hazards
 - Controlled heat minimizes the risk of overexertion or heat-related illness during training
 - Redundant safety systems to protect students and instructors in the event of malfunction
 - Class B fires burn cleaner and cooler, preserving the buildings structural integrity over time
 - Class B props can be reset quickly and used repeatedly with same scenario parameters
 - Instructors can focus on firefighter performance, tactics, and safety, rather than managing unpredictable fuel loads
- These training platforms were approximate cost of 1.5 -2 million dollars
- Alignment with State and Nation initiatives for clean burning and improved Public Safety infrastructures

Bottom line

Florida's statewide data shows vacancies + planned growth + retirements will continue to pressure hiring.

The most effective fixes expand pipeline capacity and shorten time-to-hire—especially through a county-based academy, partnerships, and sponsored training seats.

Continue to request funds for our own training facility along with partnership through local colleges and other technical facilities.

Next step: confirm hiring targets + training slots for a 12–24 month plan