

12-9-24

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of HB 441.

My name is Craig Ores and I am a parole officer with the State of Ohio serving the Lima Region. I am writing regarding the recent introduction of H.B. 441 as it pertains to parole officers' retirement and caseloads.

I have held the position as a parole officer for over 29 years and have experienced numerous changes to the position as you can imagine. The demands, stress and inherent dangers of the job have only continued to increase and there appears to be no end in sight. As parole officers, we put our lives in jeopardy on a daily basis just as any other law enforcement officer does when they start their shift.

Unfortunately, the position of parole officer has been overlooked for decades when it comes to recognizing and properly compensating them as law enforcement officers.

Each day, and typically numerous times a day, a parole officer has contact with individuals who are known, convicted felons and often considered extremely violent. Parole officers are subject to encountering firearms, edged weapons, explosives, chemical agents, vicious animals and extremely hostile individuals. Unfortunately, the dangers that we face are downplayed and ignored by those who can help facilitate change. Recruitment and retention are a significant issue with parole officers due to the expected job duties, extreme risk and the current pay scales and retirement benefit offered for the classification. These factors significantly jeopardize the safety of the citizens of Ohio.

As introduced, H.B. 441 would be of little benefit for many parole officers. A majority of parole officers would not be able to match the financial requirements to benefit from moving from traditional PERS to PERS-LE. However, there are optional scenarios where the transition would be beneficial for nearly every parole officer.

When a large percentage of parole officers were hired, the retirement benefit was to begin after completing 30 years of service without an age requirement. On January 7th, 2013 this system was changed without grandfathering any current employee into the system they were hired under. I have outlined a few possibilities below that would positively affect all current parole officers and have a positive influence on the recruitment and retention of new parole officers, thus creating a safer Ohio.

1. **Current parole officers have an option of being placed back into the category of 30 years at any age with full benefits or 25/OUT with repayment or difference.**

ALL newly hired employees will be 25/OUT (PERS-LE) after the passage of the bill

2. **ALL current parole officers moved to 30 years at any age and any newly hired employee after the bill is passes will be 25/OUT (PERS-LE)**

3. **Any individual that was employed as a Parole Officer Prior to January 7,2013 goes back to 30/OUT (Grandfathered in to what they were hired under prior to change) Essentially the current "Group A"**

Any individual hired after January 7. 2013 has the option to remain in current retirement plan (Essentially Group C) or opt into 25/OUT with repayment parameters.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of the above.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Ores", with a stylized flourish.

Craig Ores