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## CITY OF ATHENS, OHIO

Chairman Mathews, Vice-Chair King and Ranking Member Lightbody:

I'm writing you today in both my capacity as Service-Safety Director for Athens and a member of the Ohio Public Safety Directors' Association, to ask you to oppose HB 296. This bill would increase the employer contribution to the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund for police officers from 19.5% to 24%.

By rough estimation, this bill will cost the City of Athens \$150,000 per year. That equates to two police officers we could lose or simply will not hire. Multiply this cost by the hundreds and hundreds of jurisdictions across Ohio and passage of this law will mean THOUSANDS less police officers on our streets statewide. In a time when crime rates have started to rise again after their lull in the early 2000s, this is absolutely the wrong approach to governing.

As the OP&F management petitions the legislature, I would ask you to dig deep into the numbers. While it is essential to keep our public pension funds solvent into the future, there are some nuances to consider before massively increasing costs on police employers. First of all, projections of future solvency based on CURRENT economic conditions are inappropriate. The high inflation of the last couple years will not be the norm and should not be the basis for projecting the next 30 years. Secondly, there are meaningful reforms to the ease which the OP&F pension fund grants disability retirement. While our first responders deserve our support, we should rightly require a high burden of proof before they make the decisions to grant early access to a retirement. The "DROP" program should be examined to determine if it makes both financial and policy sense for Ohio. Finally, the compensation and bonus structure of the fund managers should be transparent and open – while they need talent, it would be hard to cut our police forces across the state in order to fund bonuses for financial managers. I am not saying that is happening, but it must be checked before any increase in employer contributions.

Thank you for your time in considering these points before taking up this legislation. These are hard governing issues, but both in Athens and statewide as public safety directors, we think this is the wrong policy for Ohio and will result in more crime.

Thank you,  
-Andy Stone