



**Ohio House Pension Committee**  
HB 296, Interested Party Written Testimony  
**Mike Harris, Defiance Fire Department, Local #918**  
December 12, 2023

Chairman Mathews, Vice Chair King, Ranking Member Lightbody, and members of the House Pensions Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony as an Interested Party for House Bill 296. My name is Mike Harris, a firefighter for Defiance Fire Department, IAFF Local 918.

### **My Story**

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I have been a professional union firefighter/member for 10 years at Defiance Fire Department. 4 years of which I worked as the Union Secretary alongside President Chad Brown. I also worked part-time for 6 years at the same department.

I attended Owens Community College and achieved an Associate's Degree in Fire Science. With this curriculum, I received my Fire 2 card as well as my EMT-B. After finishing my degree at Owens, and attended Four County Career Center where I received my Paramedic certification.

#### **College Isn't For Everyone**

I recall watching movies and TV shows, along with just nightly news and articles that would talk about local fire department stories, etc. I recall watching movies like Ladder 49 and it peaked my interest. I was never a book smart, office job type of person and figured something more physically demanding would be more my style.

#### **Being A Firefighter Creates a Bond**

I also really gravitated toward the idea of working with men and women as a team in a professional setting, much like I experienced while playing varsity baseball and basketball for 4 years in high school. Like many others I grew up playing sports, hunting, paintballing, etc with all my friends from high school on a weekly basis and the thought of working as a crew and that camaraderie was something familiar to me that I was drawn to. Once I was a Junior and Senior in high school, I took the idea more seriously and came down to the same department (Defiance Fire Dept) and did ride time and job shadowing. The cool thing is a lot of the same guys that were newer then are here today, close to retirement, and that bond is still there. In a way, many of these other union brothers of mine are like real brothers.

At the time of being 18 years old, pension was not something high on my priority list, but as the years went on and being more and more involved with the profession, pay and retirement became a big part of another reason for pursuing this career. Doing something you love that is fulfilling both in your career and after you retire, to be able to give service to your community and then to be able to retire comfortably was something that really cemented another reason to become a union firefighter.

#### **The Pension Is A Major Retention Factor For Me**

As many people can attest, in any profession, the older you get the more differently you can view things. I think most men and women that seek out this profession either have a relationship of something that happened to them earlier in life or felt drawn to this career because we get to do some amazing things to help people and have fun doing it. I think most young men and women seek this career because at a young age it appeals to them because it is doing something and being a part of something bigger than themselves and it makes young people feel good to wear the shirt. We love the adrenaline, and any firefighter will tell you the feeling of their first good working fire or any good working fire that goes smoothly, is a pretty awesome feeling.

Paramedics will tell you how good it feels to get a pulse back on a cardiac arrest or delivering a baby in the field. As you get more and more seasoned in this profession, the real-life stuff begins to enter your mind more. The pay, the benefits, insurance and pension. Union members give many years, blood, sweat and tears for their community. Many missed holidays, birthdays, etc. This is all worth in the feeling us Union members get when working with each other day to day and serving our community. Flat out, this is a fun career. The ability to retire with a great pension is something that many of us look forward to and ultimately feel like we deserve with the years we served communities. This ultimately is how people will care for their families, after they have cared for their communities for 25+ years.

I respectfully request you to vote in favor of HB 296.