



Public Employee Retirees, Inc. (PERI)

Ohio Senate Oversight Committee

Proponent Testimony – HCR 6,

February 28, 2024

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Concurrent Resolution 6 on behalf of the Public Employee Retirees, Inc., urging Congress to repeal the Federal Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset within the broader Social Security system.

My name is Richard Ross. I earned my OPERS pension by being the Morgan County Law Librarian, Stockport Solicitor, Morgan County Prosecuting Attorney, and Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney of Athens County. I was a special prosecutor in 13 counties. I have been an attorney for 47 years and was a prosecuting attorney for 26 years. I now serve as the Chairman of the PERI Board of Trustees. At its core, PERI's mission is to protect and preserve Ohio Public Employee Retiree pension and benefits programs and advocate for changes that are in the best interest of the organization's over 32,000 Ohio public employee retiree members and the over 220,000 retirees and 297,000 active members total who depend on or will depend on OPERS benefits.

As you've heard from the Resolution's sponsors, Representatives Plummer and King, repealing the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO) will provide meaningful relief to current retirees and public employees while treating all workers fairly. Ohio is one of twenty-six states whose public retirees are affected by this unfair law. The WEP was initially designed to ensure that individuals who received a pension from a government job that did not pay into Social Security would not receive a higher Social Security benefit as a result.

Since its inception, the WEP has unfairly reduced the Social Security benefits of countless Ohio public employee retirees. This has created financial strain for many retired public employees who are already struggling to make ends meet and who have dedicated their lives to serving their communities and often rely heavily on their pensions for financial stability in retirement. Depending on their years of service and other factors, their Social Security benefits could be reduced by up to 50% due to WEP.

Fortunately, federal legislation is currently being proposed to repeal the WEP – H.R. 82/S. 597 – also known as the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023. As of February 21, 2024, H.R. 82 has 308 bipartisan congressional cosponsors (10 of Ohio's 14 representatives), S. 597 has 50 cosponsors (including both of Ohio's senators) and that number continues to grow. This is a crucial step in ensuring that Ohio public employee retirees receive the Social Security benefits they have earned and deserve. However well-intended the law was when it was developed, it's evident over the last 40 years that its implementation has not resulted in its desired effects.

PERI is grateful for Representative Plummer's and Representative King's sponsorship of this resolution, and we thank you and the committee members for considering HCR 6. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard Ross, Chairman of the Board of Public Employee Retirees, Inc.