



February 26, 2024

The Honorable Kristina Roegner  
Chair  
Government Oversight Committee  
Ohio Senate  
1 Capitol Square, Room 142  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chair Roegner:

The Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Concurrent Resolution 6, which urges Congress to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO).

We commend Representative Plummer's and King's leadership on this issue and efforts to make Ohio's voice heard in the debate over WEP and the GPO. This is an important and timely endeavor.

Among the issues that are brought to OPERS' attention by its members, there is perhaps none that is as frequently stated as concerns regarding the impact of the WEP and the GPO. Ohio is almost uniquely situated to participate fully and forcefully in the debate over the WEP and GPO. More than 150,000 retired workers in Ohio – 8.9% of all Social Security beneficiaries within the State – are currently impacted by the WEP.<sup>1</sup> Since 1983, OPERS has observed time and again the negative impacts these offsets have had on its members' retirement security, and we frequently share these stories with the members of the Ohio congressional delegation.

It is now generally understood that the WEP and GPO are overly broad in their application and produce inequitable results. These offsets are applied at a time in most workers' and spouses' lives that they are least able to adapt to the loss of anticipated retirement income. They represent a violation of trust for individuals who chose a career of public service, not always realizing that the Social Security benefits they thought they earned would be significantly reduced as a result.

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<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)*, February 13, 2023



The problems with the WEP and GPO are clear and solvable, but a solution has been elusive. OPERS has partnered with a number of stakeholders, including public retirement systems in other states and retiree organizations, to keep the issue in front of policymakers and to encourage legislative action. Additionally, OPERS has even worked with individual members of Congress to explore alternatives to

full repeal of the WEP in the hopes that a reform measure might have a better chance of being enacted into law and provide our members with some measure of immediate and meaningful relief.

As we near the time that Congress must address the long-term solvency and sustainability of the Social Security Program, it is increasingly likely that the WEP and GPO will be treated as part of a comprehensive Social Security reform package. As such, it has never been more important for interested and affected parties to participate in the debate over the future of the WEP and GPO. The voices of the hundreds of thousands of Ohioans affected by these provisions cannot be silenced by the other concerns and questions that will be raised as Congress reviews the benefit and funding structures of the Social Security Program.

It is also important for all Ohioans to recognize the potential problems that could result from addressing the WEP and GPO as part of a larger Social Security reform effort. In particular, OPERS has long advocated that 'solving' the WEP and GPO by forcing all non-Social Security-covered employees to contribute into the Social Security Program could be harmful for the states with large non-covered public employee populations because those states will then need to provide and account for the additional contribution amounts (Currently, 6.2% of income for both employers and employees) that follow participation in the Social Security Program.

No worker should be harmed simply because they chose to pursue a career as a public servant. Our public workers, teachers, police officers, and firefighters deserve better.

OPERS looks forward to working with Representatives Plummer and King to promote our members' retirement security and ensure that all of Ohio's public employees are treated equitably.

If you have questions regarding OPERS' comments or advocacy on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact OPERS' Director of External Relations, Gordon Gatien, at 614.222.2924.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen E. Canahan".



Karen E. Carraher  
Executive Director

Cc: Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee