



SCHOOL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF OHIO

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Testimony Before the Senate Government Oversight Committee House Bill 257

**Presented by Richard Stensrud, Executive Director
School Employees Retirement System of Ohio
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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, I am SERS Executive Director Richard Stensrud. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 257, authorizing members of certain public bodies to hold and attend meetings virtually when certain conditions are met.

As you know SERS is a statewide defined benefit plan that provides retirement, disability, and survivor benefits to non-teaching employees of Ohio's public schools; including vocational, technical, and community schools; and community colleges.

SERS members' positions range from bus drivers, custodians, administrative assistants, food service providers, and educational aides to treasurers and business administrators.

The SERS Board of Trustees is responsible for making decisions regarding policy and governance of the System. The Board comprises nine members: four elected by active employee members; two elected by retired members; and three appointed investment expert members. One investment expert is appointed by the Governor, one by the State Treasurer, and one by the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate. The SERS Board meets monthly, except in January and August.

During the pandemic we found that the ability to utilize technology and the temporary authority to allow remote participation by board members enabled the board to continue to function without disruption.

Providing permissive authority to create a policy for individual board members to attend remotely going forward ensures greater likelihood of 100% participation by board members regardless of distance, weather, scheduling issues, or other possible conflicts.

Board members come from all over the state, without compensation, to serve the members and retirees of the system as their representatives.

This additional flexibility may even encourage others who may be hesitant to consider running for these seats due to the travel commitment, especially older retirees who may be reluctant to drive in poor weather conditions, to run for a board seat.

The policy would be limited to ensure the board meeting would remain physically located at the retirement system and meet all the other requirements of a public meeting.



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- Board members must attend at least half of regular meetings in person
- At least one third of board must be present in person each meeting
- All votes shall be roll call votes
- Board members must notify chairperson not less than 48 hours in advance of intent to attend remotely, except in case of emergency
- Public must be able to hear and observe discussions and deliberations of all board members including those attending remotely.

These restrictions ensure the flexibility will not be abused and that meetings will continue to be conducted in a transparent way.

This authority was granted to the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) board as part of the state operating budget bill (HB 110) in the previous General Assembly.

The Ohio Retirement Study Council has recommended that this provision be extended to all state retirement systems. The language in HB 257 is the same as the current statute for STRS.

SERS embraces the openness and public access broadcasting our board meetings have brought to our membership and stakeholder groups. We intend to continue to do so going forward. Enacting this additional flexibility for board members extends this philosophy of engagement to the work of the board.

SERS stakeholder organizations support this legislation. Our employee, retiree, and employer stakeholder groups appreciate the opportunity for greater transparency and participation in the board process. There are no organizations opposed to the proposal.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.