



**Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police
House Bill 96 – Interested Party Testimony
House Finance Committee**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written interested party testimony today on House Bill 96.

My name is Heinz von Eckartsberg. I am the retired Chief of Police in Dublin, Ohio, and most recently served as the Assistant Superintendent of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation. Today, I am representing the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) as the Chair of its Legislative Committee.

I would like to highlight several key aspects of this House Bill 96:

Police Training

Ohio's police executives strongly support high-quality, ongoing training for law enforcement officers. However, with over 900 agencies across the state, many departments struggle to fund essential training. We urge the committee to support the Governor's budget proposal of dedicating 14% of excise tax revenue from adult-use marijuana, not to exceed \$40 million per fiscal year, to ensure 40 hours of mandatory continued professional training annually for every sworn officer in Ohio.

Additionally, recruitment and retention of qualified candidates remain significant challenges. While we recognize the need for standardized academy training, OACP opposes the allocation of funds for a single, centralized training facility in Columbus without proportional funding for other OPOTA-certified academies across the state. Many agencies outside Central Ohio cannot recruit candidates willing to spend 26 weeks away from home for their initial academy training. A decentralized funding approach would better serve Ohio law enforcement.

Ohio Police & Fire Pension System

We respectfully ask the committee to incorporate language in House Bill 96 to increase employer contributions to the Ohio Police and Fire Pension System from 19.5% to 24%, aligning with current employer contributions for firefighters. As you know, this issue was previously addressed in House Bill 296, which passed the House last General Assembly.

Since 2012, OP&F pension members have endured over \$3.2 billion in benefit cuts to stabilize the fund, including:

- Raising the minimum retirement age from 48 to 52,
- Capping cost-of-living adjustments at 3%, with elimination of COLAs for those under 55,
- Replacing comprehensive health care coverage with a stipend-based model,
- Increasing member contributions from 10% to 12.25%.

Employer contributions, however, have remained unchanged for nearly 40 years. Adjusting them now is a necessary step toward long-term pension sustainability.

Funding for First Responder PTSD Support

The OACP supports the Ohio FOP's request to include funding in HB 96 for the monetization of the HB 308 fund, dedicated to assisting first responders with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and created in 2021 through passage of the bill. Additionally, we recommend designating the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation as the fund administrator to ensure proper oversight. Fully funding this initiative is a critical oversight that can and should be corrected through this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony and welcome any questions at your convenience.