



**Representative Bernie Bunyan Willis**

74<sup>th</sup> House District

House Bill 424- House Public Insurance and Pensions Committee

October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Chair Peterson, Vice-Chair Teska, Ranking Member White, and members of the House Public Insurance & Pensions committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 424. Before I continue, it is important to understand that although OP&F and OPERS-LE are similar pension systems, they are not the same. OP&F payees are full-time police officers employed by Ohio municipalities and full-time firefighters employed by Ohio townships, municipalities, joint fire districts, and, occasionally by other political subdivisions. In contrast, OPERS-LE payees encompass a much wider selection of narrower fields in the general law-enforcement space:

- Sheriffs and deputy sheriffs
- Township constables or police officers
- Criminal bailiffs or court constables who were deputized by a county sheriff
- State university law enforcement officers
- County narcotics agents
- Undercover drug agents
- Enforcement agents with the Ohio Department of Public Safety
- Park district police officers
- Conservancy district officers
- Municipal corporation police officers not covered by the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund
- Police employed by the Ohio Veterans Home
- Special police employed by a state mental health institution
- Special police employed by a state institution for the developmentally disabled
- Regional transit authority police officers
- State highway patrol police officers
- Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation investigators
- Casino Control Commission gaming agents
- Department of Taxation investigators
- Special police officers for port authorities
- Special police officers for municipal airports
- Park officers, forest officers, wildlife officers, state watercraft officers, natural resources, law enforcement officers and preserve officers, with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- Ohio House of Representatives sergeant at arms and assistant Ohio House of Representatives sergeant at arms

As you can see, while they are separate pension systems, OP&F and OPERS-LE cover a wide range of peacekeeping and law enforcement positions that would often seek to employ candidates who have a background in policing. This is to make no mention of the Ohio State Highway Patrol Pension, which is affected by the majority service credit rule just like Police & Fire. Until 2014, officers could move between them without losing their retirement credit—whether that meant going from a city department to a smaller division, or from police chief to county sheriff. But in the 130th General Assembly, one short line buried in a massive bill stripped away that portability.

Because of the majority service credit barrier between the pension systems, experienced officers or police chiefs paying into OP&F are incentivized to maintain their current roles even when presented with more promising opportunities in OPERS-LE. An experienced officer who wished to go above and beyond in serving his community by running for Sheriff would be heavily discouraged from doing so because of the credit transfer complications, since Sheriffs pay into OPERS-LE. While these are only a few examples, the practical challenges many important OPERS-LE agencies encounter as a result are numerous. To complicate matters further, individuals currently paying into OPERS-LE do not encounter the same barrier when transferring into OP&F or back again, creating a one-way recruitment door for job candidates to go from OPERS-LE into OP&F, but not from OP&F into OPERS-LE.

In the following weeks, you will hear testimony in favor of H.B. 424 from many officers in situations where they are forced to work numerous years longer simply to qualify for retirement. They will ask for your help to access the pensions and career opportunities they've earned throughout their careers. I ask that you join us in recognizing their importance and granting them their wish by giving your support to H.B. 424.

Thank you for your time this morning. I will now pass the mic over to my joint sponsor, Representative Craig.