

House Public Insurance and Pensions Committee House Bill 424
Interested Party Testimony

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Teska, Ranking Member White and members of the House Public Insurance and Pensions Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to provide written Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 424. First, I would like to thank Representatives Willis and Craig for introducing this legislation as well as Representatives Deeter, Fischer, Gross, Lear, Newman, Thomas, White, Williams and Workman for co-sponsoring.

House Bill 424 addresses a rule within the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) that affects a very minimal portion of members yet has a significant impact on not only those individuals, but also the organizations which employ them. In my circumstance, I was a Fire Captain/EMT with the Mansfield Fire Department, which fell under the Ohio Police and Fire Retirement System (OP&F). In addition to my Fire/EMS service, I am also a Registered Nurse. While still working with the Fire Department, I became employed with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), providing care for our incarcerated population at Richland Correctional Institution in Mansfield, in a part-time position under OPERS. I reluctantly left Mansfield Fire Department after requiring a spinal fusion of nine vertebrae in 2018, due to numerous injuries over my career. Though I likely could have pursued disability with OP&F at that time, I had no intention of stopping working at that age. It just wasn't in me, and I felt I had many more valuable years of service to give, even if it was no longer in the fire service. I continued my employment with ODRC, moving up through the ranks and currently work full-time, as a healthcare administrator at a statewide level for ODRC.

The rule, which House Bill 424 seeks to correct, requires that a member of OPERS, in order to transfer service time, must have more time in its system than any other state retirement system. This means that members such as me, with significantly more time in another system, must now work many more years to reach OPERS retirement eligibility. In my particular case, I will have to work an additional 8 years over the normal OPERS retirement requirements, to get to the point of having at least my total OP&F service time, plus one day, in OPERS. A related rule change was also added around the same time which made it impossible to transfer service time into OPERS until the member was within 90 days of their retirement. This meant that I couldn't just leave the fire department and transfer my service immediately, before the OPERS greater service rule change went into effect. Prior to these two rules being enacted, I would have been able to leave the OP&F position at any point, and at the same time transfer my service credit to OPERS, allowing me to retire with the same total service time as an employee with only OPERS service time. Originally, I would have been able to retire in October of 2009, before the retirement changes in 2009. As it stands, should the current rule not be changed through HB424, I will only meet the current OPERS retirement eligibility criteria for a member transferring service time in January 2032, and I will have accrued roughly a half a century of total state service time between the two retirement systems.

While my situation is quite unique, working consecutively in two systems for part of my career, I know of other OPERS members who are even more greatly affected than I. One I am aware of

was a Highway Patrol Retirement System (HPRS) member who left the Patrol, just shy of HPRS retirement age/service time, for an OPERS covered leadership position. This rule change was initiated shortly after he had switched systems. Now he is no longer eligible to go back to the Highway Patrol due to his age and because of the greater service time rule, he will have to work 20+ more years in the new OPERS covered system to achieve any state retirement. Unfortunately, these rules not only affect Individual members of OPERS, but also have a direct impact on organizations. OPERS-covered departments and agencies trying to recruit experienced personnel from outside OPERS, for the purpose of filling their leadership voids, often simply cannot do it when potential candidates see how the switch will impact them and their ability to retire. Overall, the OPERS 'greater service time' rule weakens the quality of the organizations that protect and serve the citizens of the State of Ohio, and I urge you to support House Bill 424 to change it.

Representatives Willis and Craig, I hope that you are able to encourage your fellow legislators to pass this bill, as a move to correct this unfortunate OPERS rule, and I thank you for supporting those members and organizations of Law Enforcement and Fire Service, whom it greatly impacts.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Metz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "M".

David Metz