

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Teska, Ranking Member White, and members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 280. My name is Virgil McDaniel, and I proudly served for more than 28 years as a police officer in Dayton, ending as assistant chief.

I'm here not as a union representative or lobbyist, but as a retiree who gave his working life to protecting his community and now depends on the Ohio Police &

Fire Pension Fund for the modest security I earned.

For those of us who spent decades on the streets, the word “sacrifice” isn’t a slogan – it’s a memory. We remember missing birthdays and holidays, comforting victims, and holding our breath on dark calls that could have ended our lives.

We did it willingly, because we believed in the oath we took. But we also believed in a promise – that if we upheld our duty,

Ohio would uphold hers, ensuring a stable retirement for the men and women who served.

Over the years, that promise has been tested. Active duty members have been asked to pay more into the pension fund. We've watched benefits shrink. I've been retired for over 30 years, so the COLA is incredibly important to me. We've weathered the hits because we were told it was necessary to protect solvency, and

we accepted that responsibility. We did our part – again and again.

Now it's time for employers to do theirs. House Bill 280 is a fair and measured fix to an imbalance that's lingered for decades.

Firefighters' employer contribution rate has long stood at 24 percent, while the police rate has lagged far behind. HB 280 closes that gap gradually – just one percentage point per year until parity is

reached – giving municipalities time to budget while finally bringing equity to every first responder.

HB 280 is prudent stewardship. The kind that we've come to expect from the Ohio Police and Fire Pension. We're proud of what they've been able to accomplish under trying circumstances. Still, in an age of market volatility, we need help to save the pension for the next generation of first responders.

When I retired, you could see recruitment troubles on the horizon. Today, it's bad. Departments are struggling to fill academy classes. Young people look at the headlines, the hostility, and the uncertainty about pensions and wonder if the profession is worth it.

A strong, reliable pension is one of the few assurances left that can still attract and keep good officers. HB 280 strengthens that foundation.

This isn't just about finance; it's about public safety. When officers feel abandoned, communities ultimately pay the price – in slower response times, higher turnover, and diminished morale. Ensuring a solvent pension fund is essential for safer neighborhoods. Politicians often post tributes on social media about “backing the blue.” HB 280 is your chance to prove those words mean something.

On behalf of every retiree who spent years standing the watch, I ask you to stand with us now. Keep the promise.

Strengthen the fund. Stand with us and stand with the applicant who is thinking of joining up as a first responder. Protect members from generations past like me and prepare well for the future. Vote yes on House Bill 280.

Thank you for your time and for honoring the commitment Ohio made to its first responders.