



Ohio House Public Safety Committee
HB 96, Interested Party Testimony
William Quinn, former Secretary/ Treasurer
March 4, 2025

Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee, my name is Bill Quinn retired professional fire fighter from Local 20, City of Hamilton Fire Department as the Paramedic Supervisor. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today as an interested party for HB 96. I am honoured to represent the Ohio Association of Professional Fire Fighters, which stands for over 13,500 professional firefighters across the state in 300 locals —public servants who dedicate their lives to protecting our communities, often at great personal risk.

Public Safety and Pensions: Inseparable Commitments to Ohioans

A well-funded pension is not simply a benefit for first responders—it is a critical pillar of public safety. The ability to recruit and retain highly trained firefighters and police officers is directly tied to the financial security provided by a stable and fair pension system. Communities across Ohio depend on experienced professionals to respond to emergencies and ensuring the solvency of the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund is a direct investment in that security.

When pension reform was last addressed in 2012, firefighters and police officers bore the brunt of the changes:

- Employee contribution rates increased by 25%—from 10% to 12.5%.
- The retirement age was raised from 48 to 52.
- \$3.2 billion in benefits were slashed from future retirees.
- The calculation for Average Annual Salary (AAS) was changed to five years instead of three, lowering pension benefits.
- Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) were reduced, allowing inflation to erode retirement security.

Meanwhile, municipalities contributed nothing additional to sustain the pension system. This imbalance is unsustainable, both for the financial future of first responders and for the communities that rely on their service. A pension system that forces firefighters and police officers to work longer with fewer benefits does not just impact retirees—it weakens public safety by discouraging new recruits and pushing experienced professionals out of the field prematurely.

Municipalities' Ongoing Excuses: A Threat to Public Safety

Every time we sit at the table to discuss solutions, municipalities claim they cannot afford their fair share. But what is the cost of inaction? A workforce in decline. Response times delayed. Public safety put at risk.

The incremental employer contribution increase proposed in HB 296 (from last GA) to be amendment into HB 96—just 0.75% per year over six years—is not only manageable, but it is also necessary. Without it, departments will struggle to fill positions, leading to increased firefighter and police fatigue, higher injury rates, and ultimately, compromised emergency response capabilities. This is not speculation; it is reality.

Public safety and pension stability are one and the same. A failure to invest in the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund today is a direct threat to the safety of Ohioans tomorrow. The longer municipalities delay, the more they gamble with lives—both those of first responders and the citizens they serve.

The Cost of Ignoring Pension Equity

If municipalities continue their stall tactics and refuse to contribute fairly, the result will be:

- A pension fund in crisis, leading to future benefit cuts that will make recruitment and retention even worse.
- Increased public safety risks as departments struggle to hire and retain firefighters.
- A shrinking workforce, as fewer individuals choose a career where they are asked to sacrifice more while receiving less.

A Vote for Pension Equity is a Vote for Public Safety

Ohio's firefighters and police officers show up every day, every night, in every emergency—without hesitation. We don't get to say, "Let's do another study before we save this life." Yet, when we ask for fairness in our pensions, municipalities respond with stalling, scare tactics, and excuses.

This is not about special treatment; it is about fundamental fairness and the long-term sustainability of our state's public safety infrastructure. I urge this committee to reject the fear-mongering and delays and stand with the first responders who stand for you. Amend HB 296 (from last GA) into HB 96 and ensure that Ohio's firefighters and police officers can continue to protect our communities with the security and stability they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.