



## FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE OF OHIO, INC.

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House Public Safety Committee

March 4, 2025

Testimony on House Bill 96

Chair Abrams, Vice-Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and committee members – I am Michael Weinman, director of government affairs for the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding House Bill 96.

I'm here to represent the 23,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police—active-duty officers and retirees—and ask that the state budget include several key FOP priorities.

The sworn police officers in the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Developmental Disabilities are not armed. While they are OPOTC certified and meet the requirements for continuing education, those department leaders will not allow their police officers to carry any lethal or nonlethal weapons. Unfortunately, the clients in these facilities are increasing those classified as forensic – many of which are violent offenders. While the FOP does not want officers armed within patient areas, those officers patrolling the grounds, operating the metal detectors, and providing patient escorts should be armed. Arming these officers is a change that is ripe for the budget.

In the last session, the House of Representatives passed HB 296, introduced by Representatives Abrams and Hall, which sought to eliminate the difference in employer contributions to the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund (OP&F) between police and firefighters. The bill proposed gradually increasing the employer contribution for police officers from 19.5% to 24% over six years. Employers contribute 24% to OP&F for firefighters, and this bill addressed this disparity. The change will bring equity to the uniformed services, as police and firefighters receive the same benefits from OP&F despite differences in employer contributions.

Notably, it has been 40 years since employers increased their contributions, while members of OP&F have made changes to support the system. In 2013, several changes were implemented, including increasing the minimum retirement age by four years, tying member's cost-of-living rates to the CPI, capping them at 3%, and freezing COLAs until age 55. Additionally, members lost their group insurance plan. They transitioned to a stipend-based Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) for purchasing insurance in the marketplace. The FOP would like this change to the employer contribution rate placed in the budget.

Chair Cindy Abrams

March 4, 2025

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Staying with pensions, the FOP advocates for incorporating Representatives Hall and Millers HB 73. The bill establishes a deferred retirement option plan (DROP) for law enforcement officers in the Public Employees Retirement System. Suppose you are eligible for a standard service retirement. In that case, you can enter the DROP program by delaying retirement and continuing to work as a police officer. While you continue to work and draw your typical salary, the amount you would have received in retirement benefits accumulates tax-deferred on your behalf and a portion of your employee contribution and interest. This program already exists in OP & F and OHPRS and has been instrumental in recruitment and retention.

Training has been a priority of the FOP since our inception over one hundred years ago. Strong basic training and continuing education are the foundation of our drive to professionalize our career field. However, the FOP opposes a centralized training center in Columbus. And we oppose the duplication of services by state agencies. While our members are in training, they want to go home at night, attend their kid's functions, and eat a home-cooked meal. Regional training allows them to do these things, saving their employers money. The FOP would like to see dedicated funding for LE training, which would also save their employers money. The requirement to get 40 hours of continuing education is in the ORC, but the caveat to only require that training if funds are available has been removed. Unlike other professionals who require continuing education, our members don't charge our clients hundreds of dollars an hour.

Finally, in January 2021, Governor DeWine signed HB 308. The bill provided compensation and benefits to first responders with post-traumatic stress disorder and studied the financial and administrative requirements for that fund. While OP & F received funds and commissioned a completed study, the General Assembly never placed any monies in the PTSD fund or assigned a fund manager. HB 96 can fix this oversight by designating the OBWC as the fund administrator and providing the fund with the needed monies.