

Patrick H. Crawford
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Written Proponent Testimony in support of Ohio HB 512

Insurance Committee, Ohio House of Representatives
Wednesday, March 30th, 2022

Chairman Brinkmanship, Vice Chair Lampton, Ranking Member Miranda and members of the House Insurance Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of house bill 512.

My name is Patrick Crawford, and I am a Firefighter-Paramedic and Vice President of the International Association of Firefighters Local 1814 in Westlake, Ohio. As a public safety professional and a representative of 38 other professional Firefighter-Paramedics, I urge you to support HB 512, a critical and overdue update to the Ohio Police and Fire Pension system.

I believe this critical update is overdue, as employer contributions have remained untouched for nearly 36 years while sacrifices to maintain our pension's solvency have been placed squarely on the backs of Ohio's finest and bravest. In 2012, through legislative action the retirement age for first responders was raised from 48 to 52, cost of living adjustments (COLAs) were eliminated until members reach the age of 55, COLAs were tied to the Consumer Price Index (the metric used to measure inflation) but capped at 3%, and member contributions were raised 2.25%. In 2018, health care coverage for retirees was moved to a stipend based model which radically altered benefits that had long been relied upon.

I recognize that municipalities will have to re-examine their budgets to account for an increase in contributions (which would be instituted over a five year period). However, members of my bargaining unit have made sacrifices as well. Over the past ten years my members have submitted to a medical surveillance program that results in higher health insurance contributions for them, and those hired in 2016 and beyond can no longer carry their working spouse on their city offered health insurance.

None of us that chose this profession expected to get rich. One of the things we considered though, was that after a decades-long career of serving and protecting our communities and subjecting ourselves to dangers of physical and mental injury that we would be able to retire with dignity. Recently, our city has seen dwindling numbers of new applicants. We have not been at full strength for many, many years, running short-staffed despite annually increasing emergency incident responses and a worldwide pandemic. I believe that the uncertainty around the ability to enjoy a secure retirement factors into this recruitment issue.

I respectfully ask this committee to support Ohio House Bill 512, and thank you for the opportunity to testify.