

**State Representative Nickie J. Antonio**

**Ohio House District 13**

Aging and Long Term Care Committee

March 7, 2018

Sponsor Testimony HB 486

Good afternoon Chair Arndt, Vice Chair Pelanda, Ranking Member Howse and Members of the House Aging and Long Term Care Committee. Thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 486, which is such an important piece of legislation.

I think we all know that serving as a First Responder is not for the faint of heart, and that there are many responsibilities within the role of an emergency medical service (EMS) worker. Continuous training, increasing call volumes and exhausting shifts only scratch the surface.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to the CDC, the fatality rate for EMS workers is almost double that of other emergency occupations.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is important to note that EMS personnel are exposed to inclement weather, contagious diseases, vehicle collisions, volatile scenes including scenes of domestic violence, and hostile patients to name a few of the job hazards.[[3]](#footnote-3) And while EMS members are provided with the additional training necessary, dealing with these volatile scenes still prove to be incredibly dangerous.

In just my community alone, the Cleveland EMS crew are being trained in protocol regarding situations involving active shooters[[4]](#footnote-4), civil unrest, mentally ill patients, combative patients and hazardous materials. Cleveland EMS workers are now required to wear bulletproof vests at all times due to the incredible risk they take on every time they are called to a scene.[[5]](#footnote-5)

House Bill 486 would specify that EMS workers are considered public safety officers under the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS).

Currently EMS workers are not considered for retirement until after 32 years of service, whereas public safety officers, including law enforcement officials and firefighters, are considered for retirement after 25 years in the field.

This bill would ensure that new workers and their employers pay into the pension fund the higher contribution rates for public safety officers. Moreover, if older workers wish to retire before they reach 32 years of service, they will have to reimburse OPERS, both the employer and the employee shares of the higher contribution rates, as though they had been paying into the pension fund at the higher rates for the entire service credit period.

This plan is financially sound and smart for the state of Ohio. In the City of Cleveland alone, as shown on the chart on your tablets, their fiscal department found that the grand total savings per employee, who retires at 25 years as opposed to 32 years, including the higher contribution rate of 18.1% to OPERS, is about $100, 602.

I would also like to note that many EMS workers are forced into an early disability retirement due to the stress and hazards of their job. In turn, this causes a stress on a system that expected 32 years of contributions making it so that OPERS does not receive the contributions that they were expecting as well as the state of Ohio now has to provide disability for that injured EMS worker.

Paramedics and emergency medical technicians face the same occupational hazards and dangers as the public safety officers do as previously mentioned. These high rates of injury and mental stress take a substantial physical and psychological toll as these employees age.

EMS workers certainly fit the spirit of the OPERS statute that allow earlier retirement for public safety officers because of the dangers of their jobs. It is critical to note that EMS workers’ dedication to public safety is no less than that of current public safety officers under the 25-year retirement plan. They put their lives on the line every single day, and they should be eligible for the fair and equitable retirement that they truly deserve.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to take any questions at this time.

1. https://frontlinerehab.com/ems-workers-high-rates-illnesses-fatal-injuries-non-fatal-injuries/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/programs/epr/risks.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://frontlinerehab.com/ems-workers-high-rates-illnesses-fatal-injuries-non-fatal-injuries/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.ems.ohio.gov/links/ems\_evolution-of-ems-response-to-active-shooter-incidents.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://fox8.com/2016/01/06/cleveland-ems-crews-ordered-to-wear-bulletproof-vest-at-all-times-i-team/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)