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House Insurance Committee

March 30, 2022

Testimony on House Bill 512

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Chair Brinkman, Vice-Chair Lampton, Ranking Member Miranda, and members of the committee,

I am Gary Wolske, a retired Garfield Heights police officer who now serves as the President of Ohio's Fraternal Order of Police. I'm here as the voice of 24,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police – active-duty officers and retirees, and in solidarity with firefighters with whom we share a pension system to urge you to support HB 512. The bill provides common-sense reforms to our pension system to keep it solvent for another generation.

I'm here today in the name of good government, asking you to address a problem on the horizon rather than bringing you an emergency.

The problem is making sure our pensions are secure – making sure that the promise made to officers is kept. This is, of course, vitally important. Police officers pay into their pension themselves throughout their careers and take for granted that they will receive the return on that investment in retirement.

It's also inherent in recruitment. A quality pension makes the job more desirable. As departments undergo buyouts and mass retirements, it's absolutely essential that the pension is unquestionably secure as a recruiting tool to bring in the next generation of men and women who will protect and serve our communities.

I heard something during the sponsor testimony that concerned me. I heard that we're asking municipalities to pick up the tab here – to carry this burden alone. That's just not true. It's not accurate. And, frankly, it's insulting. Our members have seen their own contribution to their pension increase.

Our members have seen a fundamental change in the way the cost-of-living increase is applied as a cost saver for the pension.

Our retirees saw a massive change to their health care, moving to a stipend model. That process was painful and confusing for our members, but it was ultimately accepted in the name of stabilization.

Meanwhile, the employer contribution has remained the same since 1986—thirty-six years without an increase from municipalities.

No, this isn't forcing a burden solely on the municipalities. This is asking them to

Chairman Thomas Brinkman

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join with us – finally, after 36 years to contribute to keeping our pension solvent. Everyone must agree that the value of our employer's contributions has shrunk over the last 36 years. A dollar in 1986 is worth forty- two cents today.

House Bill 512 would responsibly phase in an increase in employer contribution that would bring our pension fund in line with the Ohio Highway Patrol Retirement System. And it would still be lower than many comparable systems. Louisiana's employer contribution is 38 percent. Montana's is 43 percent. Miami, Florida pays 35 percent.

Now is the time. As the pension fund's assumed rate of return is reduced, our system will fall out of compliance. My members have played ball and suffered from tough decisions to ensure their pension is solvent. The time is now for employers to increase their share.

It's **NOT** an unreasonable ask. We're **NOT** asking them to carry the burden alone. We need municipalities and the legislature to support first responders. House Bill 512 is good government. It's a responsible solution. My 25,000 members ask for your yes vote.

Thank you