

GARY WOLSKE TESTIMONY – HB 512

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee – Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today in favor of House Bill 512 which provides common sense reforms to our pension system meant to keep it solvent for another generation.

I'm here as the voice of the 25,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police – active-duty officers and retirees, and in solidarity with firefighters with whom we share a pension system.

I'm here today to encourage this committee to address one crucial problem – making sure our pensions are secure and 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.

A recent poll about this bill found that ninety-two percent of Ohioans believe that it's important that municipalities keep their promises to adequately fund police and firefighters' pensions. Overwhelmingly, **62 percent** of Ohio residents believe it's time for employers to increase their share.

The security of our pension is an important piece of recruitment. A quality pension makes the job more desirable. As departments undergo buy outs 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.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce released a poll in October that revealed some surprising data.

Seventy-four percent of Ohio adults feel that violent crime is on the rise. Talk to any officer who's on the street – they'll tell the same story. With this in mind, shouldn't we be doing more to support our law enforcement, not less? House Bill 512 is an investment in law enforcement and, by extension, the safety of our communities.

For those who wonder if this is the best solution to shore up law enforcement pensions, let me assure you that we have tried every other road. Already, our members have seen their own contribution to their pension increase.

Our members have also 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. 36 years without an increase from municipalities.

We're asking municipalities to join with us years to contribute to keeping our pension solvent. Especially now that they are experiencing record revenues.

Everyone must agree that the value of our employer's contributions have 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. The volatility of the markets makes the future of the pension fund uncertain. 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.