

September 26, 2023

Chair Mathews, Vice Chair King, Ranking Member Lightbody, members of the House Pensions Committee and Representative's Click and Willis,

This is a letter in strong SUPPORT of H.B. No. 94.

### My Personal Pension Fund History

I began my career in law enforcement with the Columbus Division of Police [hereinafter CPD] as a police officer on November 3, 1996 and simultaneously entered the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund. After sixteen years of service with CDP I joined the Franklin County Sheriff's Office on January 2, 2013. At that time my pension fund switched from OP&F to the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System [hereinafter OPERS]. I served as a Major in 2013 and the following year I was promoted to the rank of Chief Deputy in 2014, the position I currently hold today.

### 130<sup>th</sup> General Assembly – Senate Bill 42

In 2013 I was advised by OPERS representatives that I would be eligible for a "Joint-Pension" Retirement. Since my OP&F time was vested there was no need for me to worry about purchasing that time and it would be brought over when I had enough added PERS-LE years of credit towards my retirement/pension. That all changed legislatively on March 25, 2015, when SB 42 of the 130<sup>th</sup> General Assembly went into effect. This bill was abruptly amended and impacted multiple pension systems that the Ohio Retirement Study Council had not reviewed substantively.

### Current Impact on Career Public Safety Professionals

As you know OP&F and OPERS are disparate retirement systems with the same goal that is achieved significantly differently. During my time with CPD I attained 16.2 years of qualifying service credit through the Ohio Police and Fire Pension System. Because of SB 42 and the disbandment of the "Joint-Pension" Retirement option, I will now have to serve an additional 16.2 years to be eligible for a service retirement. There are hundreds of others, that the lack of public pension congruently impacts.

### Future Impact on Communities

If the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly passes House Bill 94 it will positively impact public safety professionals, but more importantly it will positively impact the citizens of Ohio. Currently, I would strongly discourage any public safety professional from switching from OP&F to OPERS or vice-versa. By switching public safety agencies, the professional is harming himself and his family by negatively extending his stressful career. Law enforcement and fire service are highly stressful careers that are dedicated to help people they never met. These professionals spend their professional lives serving people in crisis. So why has the General Assembly made THE most difficult

careers even harder? Certainly, by switching agencies that have disparate pension systems does not make practical or financial sense, for individuals, families, or communities.

In this current era of a lack of public safety professionals the state legislature has limited these men and women the ability to enhance their careers and improve communities by lateral transfers throughout the state. If House Bill 94 is not passed this clearly will limit minorities from switching from one pension fund to the another.

If House Bill 94 is passed, this will provide county commissioners, mayors, city councils, city managers, township trustees and other community leaders an opportunity to recruit talented public safety professionals without regard to the pension fund challenges that currently exists.

### Conclusion

Please know that I believe none of us who are in this position are trying game the system, we only want to be provided our opportunity to utilize our earned service credit. Our continued service to our communities and ultimately to the State of Ohio will continue, we just want our time and pensions to be calculated fairly, based out when and where we have served unselfishly.

I encourage the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to respond to this **911 call by public safety professionals** who have switched public pensions to better serve THEIR communities.

Thank you for consideration in this matter and thank you for all you do in service to the citizens of Ohio.

Respectfully Submitted,

---

Chief Deputy James Gilbert  
Franklin County Sheriff's Office