

Chairman Mathews, Vice Chair King, Ranking Member Lightbody, and members of the House Pensions Committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to submit written interested party testimony on House Bill 94. First, I would like to thank Representatives Click and Willis for Introducing this legislation.

House Bill 94 addresses a rule within the Ohio Public Employees Retirement that affects a very small number of members, yet has a significant impact on not only those individuals, but also the organizations which employ them. In my circumstance, I was a Fire Captain/EMT with the Mansfield Fire Department. In addition to my Fire/EMS experience, am also a Registered Nurse and became employed part-time with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, providing care for our incarcerated population at Richland Correctional Institution.

The rule requiring a member of OPERS to have more time in its system than any other state retirement system, meant that members such as myself with significantly more time in another system must now work many more years in order to reach OPERS retirement eligibility. In my particular case, this requires me to work an additional 8+ years over the retirement requirements for other OPERS members. Essentially, this rule forced me to leave the Fire Department, which I had not intended, to stop accruing time within the OP&F system. This, so that I could someday have more time in OPERS and finally become eligible for an OPERS retirement. A related rule change that was added around the same time, determined that service could no longer be transferred until the member was within 90 days of retirement. This prevented me from leaving the fire department and transferring my service prior to this OPERS greater service change rule taking place. With the current rule, which H.B. 94 seeks to correct, to reach current OPERS retirement eligibility criteria, I will have to accrue 50 years, 8 months of total state service between the two systems for which I have worked.

While my situation is quite unique, working consecutively in two systems, I know of other OPERS members who are even more greatly affected. One I am aware of was a Highway Patrol Retirement System (HPRS) member who left the Patrol shortly before retirement for an OPERS leadership position. This rule change was initiated shortly after he had switched systems. Now he is not eligible to go back to the Patrol due to his age and because of the greater service time rule, he will have to work 20+ more years in the new OPERS covered system to achieve any state retirement.

Unfortunately, these rules not only affect Individual members of OPERS, but it also has a direct impact on their organizations. For some agencies, to lose a leader with decades of experience, such as myself, because of a rule change, can leave a significant deficit. This is especially detrimental at a time when many departments are facing major struggles even filling their entry-level positions with quality candidates. Conversely, having this rule also impacts many of the states' OPERS-covered departments and agencies trying to recruit experienced personnel from outside OPERS, in order to fill their own leadership voids. Overall, this rule weakens the quality of the organizations that protect and serve the citizens of the State of Ohio.

Representatives Click and Willis, I hope that you are able to encourage your fellow legislators to pass this bill, as a move to correct this OPERS rule, and I thank you for supporting those members and organizations of Law Enforcement and Fire Service, which it greatly impacts.

Sincerely,

David Metz