



Northern Ohio Fire Fighters Association

P.O. Box 222, Mount Eaton, Ohio 44659

www.NOFF.org

November 13, 2023

Chairman Mathews , Vice Chairwoman King, Ranking Member Lightbody and Members of the House Pensions Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 296. My name is Sam Gmetro, and I am in my 18th year of service as a firefighter with the Bay Village Fire Department. I am also a 19 year resident of the City of Cleveland and the President of the Northern Ohio Firefighters Association (NOFF.)

I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the Northern Ohio Firefighters Association.

NOFF represents members of 21 Local fire unions, with active firefighters in five Ohio counties, and retired members in those counties and several others that are outside of Ohio. We have a history of service and we know the importance of working to move Ohio forward, as our members have served on the State Fire Commission and multiple statewide task forces. We have been involved in regionalization projects, fire life safety programs, recent Ohio Supreme Court case law, and previous pension reform. In addition, giving back and being active in the communities we serve, and beyond, is also very important to NOFF and its members. We have organized and raised millions of dollars in funding for various charities over the years through NOFF Charities 501(c)(3) and programs like Aluminum Cans for Burned Children to benefit firefighters and their families in need, burn units and victims of fire.

As I am sure you are aware, all active members of the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund pay the same percentage (12.25%) into the fund. However, the employer percentage is not equal. Fire employers pay 24% and police employers pay 19.5%. To be clear: there is no legitimate reason for this disparity. As a result of this disparity in pension contributions, firefighters and their employers have been subsidizing police pensions for decades. Prior to 1986 the employer contributions rate fluctuated. Some years police paid more than fire, and some years fire paid more. The legislature set the rate at the 1986 levels and hasn't changed them since. In that same time period, the employee rate has risen from 9.5% in 1986 to 12.25% today. All of this while other Ohio pension systems have made significant changes to the employer contribution rates for the betterment of their respective funds.

House Bill 296 will finally correct the unequal contributions to the police and fire retirement system. This equalization of employer contributions is not only just and fair for future contributors to the fund, but it is also long overdue. It is for this reason

that the Northern Ohio Firefighters Association (NOFF) strongly supports House Bill 296. Police officers and firefighters belong to the same retirement system and receive the same benefits.

Thank you again and I urge you to pass this measure and make it Ohio law to ensure we are treated fairly and so that employers pay the same contribution percentage for the same benefits.