



## OHIO ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE, INC.

### H.B. 296

#### Proponent Testimony

#### Chief (ret.) Heinz von Eckartsberg, Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police

Greetings Chairman Mathews, Vice Chair King, Ranking member Lightbody and members of the House Pensions Committee. My name is Heinz von Eckartsberg. I am the retired Chief of Police for the City of Dublin, and most recently, the former Assistant Superintendent for the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation. After a 39+ year career as a full-time law enforcement officer, I am now representing the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police as the Chair of our Legislative Committee.

I am testifying today as a proponent for H.B. 296 and respectfully request your support of this legislation to ensure that pensions for the majority of Ohio's law enforcement officers are secure in the future.

As you all know, police officers and firefighters in the Ohio Police and Fire Pension System pay towards their future pensions throughout their careers. It is vital that the promise of a secure pension at the end of their careers is kept and that their investment is protected. This promise is a key tool used in recruitment in a marketplace where it is becoming more and more difficult to attract qualified candidates to protect Ohio's communities.

As you also know, the burden of the adjustments to the Police and Fire Pension System funding model in recent years have fallen **solely on the backs of our pension members** who, since 2012, have absorbed **\$3.2 billion in benefit cuts** to keep their pension fund stable, have seen the minimum retirement age raised by four years (from 48 to 52), have endured cost of living adjustments that were capped at 3% (and eliminated for retirees under age 55), and lost their previous health care coverage which was replaced by a stipend-based HRA. This is a continuation of the assumption that has prevailed for almost 40 years that every time there is a funding challenge to our pension system the solution is to increase employee contributions, reduce benefits, or increase the eligible retirement age. Instead, this bill would mark the first time that employer contributions have been increased, and not placed on the backs of our members since they were **frozen by the legislature in 1986**.

We believe that these phased increases are reasonable and would bring employer contributions more or less in line with the state's contributions to the Ohio Highway Patrol Retirement System and those of public pension systems in other states. We also believe it is time for Ohio's municipal employers to increase their share of the burden of funding this vital pension system. As you know, since the OP&F board's action last February to cut the fund's assumed rate of return from an industry-high eight percent to 7.5 percent, without some type of legislative action the OP&F funding timeline will be pushed to 43 years, well outside the state-mandated 30-year

requirement. We feel it is vital that these changes be made, while still allowing time for local governments to plan these needed changes over the next five years.

The Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police strongly supports this legislation. We understand that this marks the path forward for OP&F and that failure to pass this legislation will force the board to, once again, place the burden to save this fund on the backs of Ohio's first responders. We urge you to support H.B. 296.

Thank you.