



Ohio House Pension Committee
HB 296, Proponent Testimony
Pete Casiccio, Grounds Trustee for The Capital City Lodge No. 9
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Chairman Mathews, Vice Chair King, Ranking Member Lightbody, and members of the House Pensions Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a Proponent for House Bill 296 on behalf of the Capital City Lodge No. 9. The Capital City Lodge No. 9 is presently the third largest local lodge in the F.O.P. nationally with more than 4500 members and represents 29 law enforcement agencies throughout Franklin County.

Historically, law enforcement officer positions have been relatively easy to fill and often attracted many more applicants than available positions. Law enforcement careers once represented a stable work environment, promotional opportunities, good benefit packages, predictable retirement and generally positive career image. Over the years, some of those attractive factors have dwindled, and, simultaneously, workplace expectations have changed. This has resulted in law enforcement agencies' failing to receive the number of qualified applicants necessary to fill the ranks.

CRISIS IN RECRUITING & RETAINING GOOD COPS

Ohio is facing labor shortages, and public service departments aren't immune to this crisis. Multiple social, political, and economic factors at play, making police officer shortages a complex challenge for law enforcement departments to face. Recruiting, training, and retaining a capable police force are critical for the wellbeing of any community.

A 2022 Public Safety Trends Report found, "since 2020, police and fire agencies had to contend with COVID-19, national protest and riots, a historic rise in violent crime, and a general decline in goodwill towards first responders." The role of law enforcement continues to be argued in the court of public opinion compounding our struggles in labor shortages through less candidates in the recruiting pools, men and women leaving the profession early, and cities implementing buyouts in the wake of philosophical changes at the helm. What once City of Columbus would have had 200 to 300 applicants for a very limited number of positions, we are lucky to have 50.

THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION GROWTH, INCREASE IN CRIME, AND STRAINED PUBLIC SAFETY

The Columbus metro population is growing at a rate of 1.1% per year, which exceeds the national average. It is the second fastest growing large city in the Midwest after Indianapolis. What's more, its growth held steady last year in a time when most cities suffered declining performance. Indy's growth rate has eroded the last two years running, so if trends continue, Columbus will be #1 in short order.

Crime can have a significant impact on a city's economy. Among its many deleterious effects on social well-being, including widespread violent crime —can undermine cities economies by reducing investment, output, and growth.

- High crime rates can lead to a decrease in property values, which can negatively affect the city's tax base and revenue.
- Crime can also lead to a decrease in tourism, which can have a negative impact on local businesses.
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LODGE 9'S LONG STANDING PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY OF COLUMBUS

Our law enforcement members are not capable of solving all the problems within Columbus' community alone; however, our partnerships between public safety and the City have been effective over the years. Lodge 9 and its members have a track record of being empathetic and responsive to the City's hardships over the years

- Reopening clauses
- Mid contract negotiations
- Pension pickup program
- Forging raises in contracts

It is not just contracting related items that we have been at the table for, we have been responsive in public policy crisis and initiatives.

- Civilian Review Board
- Look back period for body worn cameras
- Training augmentations

WE HAVE HAD YOUR BACK, NOW WE NEED YOU TO HAVE OURS

In 2012, our pension underwent massive pension reform – an effort that consisted only of employee sacrifices.

- The retirement age for first responders was raised from 48 to 52.
- Cost of living adjustments (COLAs) were eliminated until members reach the age of 55.
- COLAs were tied to the Consumer Price Index (the metric used to measure inflation) but capped at 3%.
- Member contributions were raised from 10% to 12.25% with no change to employer contributions.
- These sacrifices resulted in a 3.2 billion dollar decrease in unfunded liabilities.
- The most recent change to our pension was the OP&F's move to a stipend based health care coverage model in 2018 that dramatically changed our healthcare coverage.

We are not asking for a windfall or substantial raises. We need our local jurisdiction partners to do their part. Ohio's police and fire fighters would not be standing before you; if law enforcement and fire organizations in Ohio were properly staffed and the bifurcation between the employer contributions was not there.

I respectfully request your support of this legislation to ensure that pensions for many Ohio's law enforcement officers are secure in the future.

My Story

I was 5 and I remember telling my mom emphatically "I will be a cop like dad when I grow up". My dad, Ben Casuccio, was a Sergeant from The Columbus Division of Police Narcotics Bureau and the ATF - one of the most challenging and unique careers in law enforcement, loyally serving for 32 years.

After graduating high school, I enrolled in THE Ohio State University. Sophomore year came (2011) and 9/11 happened. I called my parents that day and told them I felt the calling to enlist – immediately. After some *tense* negotiations with my father, I agreed to finish my college degree and then enlist.

I enlisted in the US Coast Guard, was active duty for 10 years, served three tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and ended my military career Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Casuccio. 2013, I finally started my career as a police officer for the City of Columbus. When I took my oath, I committed to giving the City of Columbus my best 32 years of my life – just like Sargent Ben Casuccio did, my hero.

I have 2 young boys (7 & 5) and watch them play "Cops & Robbers" now wondering if either of them will continue the tradition of being one of Columbus's finest.