



**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
FIRE FIGHTERS  
WEST CHESTER, LOCAL # 3518**

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Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 296

Chairman Mathews, Vice-Chair King, Ranking Member Lightbody and Members of the House Pension Committee, thank you for allowing the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 296, legislation that intends to provide stability for the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund (OP&F).

I was not supposed to be a fire fighter. My grandfather and father were, both served the City of Cleveland. My father wanted something better for me and pushed toward college. I went to the University of Cincinnati and graduated with an engineering degree. Years later, and to the dismay of my father, I set my degree aside and changed careers. I have been a West Chester Township fire fighter for 24 years.

I have witnessed many issues that influenced this profession. I have witnessed the effects on our members and their families. It is why I have dedicated my career representing and advocating for them, addressing issues with prudent solutions.

Pension funding is the next critical issue.

In 2013, when OP&F was facing a similar crisis, only Ohio's fire fighters and police officers stepped up. Fire fighters and police officers paid more for a decreased benefit. They sacrificed a change in retirement age and cost of living adjustments.

My advocacy led me to Columbus, serving OP&F as the Active Fire Fighter Trustee from 2014 to 2019. As a member of the Board, we were entrusted with continuing the 30-year funding strategy after massive pension reform. It was a delicate balance that faced additional pressure. The Board had tried to address the disparity in employer contributions (19.5% for police officers, 24% for fire fighters). In 2018, the Board was pressured to reduce its assumed rate of return on investments. That alone added unfunded liability and stalled pension reform progress. We also faced health care funding issues and had to make drastic changes.

Most recently, OP&F continued to hold the highest assumed rate of return on investments of any comparable public fund in the nation. The rate was significantly reduced in February 2022, based on market assumptions. Again, it added unfunded liability without a mechanism to achieve the 30-year funding mandate. Appropriate funding is now critical.

Since 2013, fire fighters and police officers bear the full weight of all contribution increases, reforms, changes and benefit cuts. The employer contributions have not changed since 1986.

Local government revenues are strong. The legislature is positioned to act. House Bill 296 proposes to increase police employer contributions to 24%, bringing equity to all of those receiving benefits from the pension fund.

This legislation will provide sound funding for OP&F. It provides a basis for recruiting and retaining public safety employees statewide. Public safety employees count on the stability of pension and disability benefits, which this funding critically provides. Ohio's fire fighters and police officers cannot face more cuts. This funding demonstrates the legislatures' and employers' commitment to the State's public safety workers, providing them a dignified and stable retirement.

This issue cannot wait. This is responsible governing and a sound fiscal solution. I respectfully urge the Committee to support House Bill 296.

Thank you for allowing my testimony.