

04/09/2015

Senator Stoltze
State Capitol Room 125
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: 907-465-4958

Dear Senator:

My name is Patrick O'Connor and I have been an Alaska resident for 10 years and I have been in your district for 6 after moving down from the interior. I am a Police Officer with the Anchorage Police Department and am currently working on day shift patrol after working Mid shift for 3 years. I have been working for the APD for three and half years after leaving a position as a Special Agent with the Federal Government in Anchorage. Throughout my tenure as a law enforcement officer I have acquired numerous certifications and trainings that not only benefit me but the people that I serve in Anchorage, Chugiak, and Eagle River. Many of these trainings are very desirable in the law enforcement profession such as the Critical Incident Team (CIT Officer) training. I also perform as a Field Training Officer (FTO) where I am tasked with training and evaluating new Police Officers. I have also had the opportunity to work very closely with the Anchorage Police Department Employee's Association on issues that I feel are very important to our profession.

One of the current issues that I am most concerned with is our Tier IV retirement system. I made the decision to give up a pension where I was vested with the Federal Government to work under the Tier IV retirement system in 2011 to serve the citizens of Alaska. Since I have been a part of the APD I have observed state wide that the retirement program is a detriment to its employees and the people they serve. There is now no incentive for employees to continue to work under this system and it has become a training ground where people can get top- notch training and take it elsewhere, either to the private sector or agencies in the lower 48. I have seen this first hand on many occasions and as a husband, and father of two I have serious thought about it myself. Then I think: "who will fill in my shoes?" Years ago it was not a problem to find police officers and firefighters but in today's climate we can not even fill academies. There may be several factors to all of this and I can assure you of one thing, Tier IV is a major contributor.

Even though I have been in law enforcement for many years I started in the Tier IV system at 31 years old. It just so happens that I was the average age of most hired by the department. Based on the physical nature of the work, the amount of gear I carry (my duty gear and vest is approximately an additional 30 pounds that I carry everyday), and the mental stress my opportunity to work and be successful is much shorter than many other professions. With the shorter work life expectancy I do not have the ability to ensure a healthy retirement for my family.

I am a police officer not a financial planner, broker, or investment banker. I am a responsible adult and family man and I take responsibility for my financial well- being. There is little in life I have control over and that includes my families financial future with a defined contribution retirement plan. I continue to give everything I can to help keep the citizens of Alaska and the Municipality of Anchorage safe.

HB 90 introduces a plan that I believe will meet the concerns of the State and also it's employees. This plan is called a Variable Benefit Retirement Plan and it allows the state to remain fiscally responsible while addressing some of my worries with Tier IV. This plan is crucial to the survival of current and future public safety employees by providing a defined benefit. This plan will create self sufficient retirees instead of ones that are forced onto government assistance. Unlike other retirement plans that have been very successful in the past to employees, this plan does not include overtime into the employees "high 5" years so there will not be any "padding" the personal retirement fund.

To me, the bottom line of HB90 is it will help departments of public safety throughout the state be able to hire AND retain good, intelligent, and desirable employees for the future of Alaska.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important matter which concerns all citizens of this great state. If you have any further questions or wish to contact me please do not hesitate.

Sincerely,

Patrick O'Connor
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