

Date: February 19, 2018
To: Senator Kelly
Subject: PERS Tier IV

Dear Senator Kelly,

This letter is in regard to the current retirement system in place for newly hired firefighters starting with the Anchorage Fire Department. I am a Captain with AFD and am fortunate enough to have been employed for almost 18 years. I have instructed at every new hire fire academy the past 16 years. I have had an active part in most of the firefighter's development that were hired after me, and I am professionally and emotionally invested in all of them. Although my concern is for public safety in Alaska as a whole, the direct impact to AFD is what I find most noticeable.

When I tested in 2000, AFD had to rent the Egan Center to accommodate upwards of 800 applicants for the written exam. It was a very competitive process, offering AFD a large pool of qualified candidates to offer jobs. Over the years I have seen the testing pool noticeably diminish to where AFD is lucky to have several hundred applicants. This results in a much narrower hiring pool for AFD. Getting a firefighter hired, through an eight week academy, and a year and a half probation period is a very expensive and labor intensive effort for AFD and the candidate. When and if they do make it off of probation, they are a highly qualified and able employee for AFD. These employees are a very valuable asset to AFD, and (unfortunately) to other outside departments.

It is virtually guaranteed that any firefighter hired under the SOA Tier III retirement system will give the city/ state at least 20 years of service if not 25 years plus. AFD has seen a significant number of highly trained Tier IV employees leave for jobs outside of Alaska the past ten years. Currently there are upwards of 22 Tier IV firefighters that have tested and/ or already left for other departments outside Alaska. As an officer for AFD, I find this very alarming. I need highly trained and experienced firefighters to do my job safely and to provide the best service for the citizens of Anchorage. This proves very difficult when our time is spent training new firefighters because of a high turnover rate of experienced fire fighters leaving AFD for better retirement systems.

As Alaska's largest city and largest fire department, this effects everyone in the state. All Alaska residents eventually pass through here and could potentially need the services of AFD. They deserve the best possible service by the most experienced employee. We can't keep losing our Tier IV firefighters and provide this service. It is costing the tax payers too much money to constantly be replacing our employee pool. Anchorage and Alaska's public safety workers deserve better, as do the constituents. Please fix the retirement to a Defined Benefit System so AFD can attract and retain qualified employees. Thank you for your time.

Mark Stephens

Captain

Anchorage Fire Department

