

Representative Cathy Tilton
Alaska Representative District 12
State Capital,
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Representative Cathy Tilton,

My name is Cody Fenton, a constituent and voter in Wasilla District 12. I have drafted this letter to petition for your support of HB79. I am both a lifelong Alaskan and an Airport Police and Fire Officer II who has served the state for 10 years. I am currently working under the Tier IV Retirement System, which unfortunately does not provide adequate retirement security to myself or my brothers and sisters in uniform. This lack of retirement security is the primary reason why Alaska has struggled to maintain Public Safety staffing levels.

HB79 will provide long term retirement security for first responders, which will help to keep officers like me working for the state. I know this firsthand because there is currently a large age disparity at my department. The officers who are a part of the Tier III Defined Benefits Retirement system are generally much older than Tier IV members. We have roughly 20 sworn personnel who are part of the Tier III system, with the majority of them nearing the last few years of 25 year careers, who are over 40-50 years old. Our department has approximately 40 Tier IV employees who are mostly in their 20's and have primarily less than five years of service. This disparity between the older Tier III members and the younger Tier IV members is due to the fact Tier III was discontinued in 2006. The disparity exists because Tier IV members have no long term incentive to stay employed in the Public Safety profession, and thus leave state employment after roughly five years of service. The fifth year of service is of course the point at which any Tier IV employee becomes 100% vested and can take their defined contributions elsewhere.

There have been several officers I used to work with who have left for out of state employment. Of those who maintained their service as first responders, they departed for a benefits system which provided better security for their families. It has become common for Tier IV employees to routinely "shop" around for better benefits. Of the Tier III employees at my department, I know every single one intends to stay employed at our department until they reach the age of retirement because of Tier III.

When other officers depart for better benefits, it creates a strain on those of us who do stay. Work in the public safety profession is not like an office job. If someone leaves employment which makes the department short staffed, the work cannot wait until later. In the public safety profession, later is too late. Lives are at stake. Because of this short staffing, I have routinely been forced to work mandatory overtime on my regularly scheduled days off in order to fill the void of those who have departed. When employees leave our department, it takes more than a year to train a replacement to minimum competency. For example, in the last 12 months I've worked 448 hours of overtime, and all holidays due to being understaffed. It's near impossible to use benefits like leave due to the demands of maintain acceptable levels of manning when crime rates are rising. These additional hours fatigue the professional performance of any individual.

I know providing defined benefits for first responders would keep more quality people like me employed within the state because it provides a peace of mind and security for us and our families.

Representative Tilton, I respectfully ask you to support HB79.

Your Constituent from District 12, Officer Cody Fenton

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