

WEST COAST COALITION



February 24, 2025

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon
Speaker of the House
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Chuck Kopp
House Majority Leader
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Speaker Edgmon and Majority Leader Kopp, Members of the House Finance Committee, and Members of the Alaska House of Representatives:

The West Coast Law Enforcement Coalition, representing public safety organizations from California, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and Alaska, write to express our strong support *House Bill (HB) 78: An Act relating to the Public Employees' Retirement System of Alaska and the teachers' retirement system*. These plans are crucial for recruiting and retaining qualified personnel in our field, ensuring retirement security, and maintaining a robust public safety workforce.

Defined benefit pensions play a vital role in the "*three Rs*" of workforce management: recruitment, retention, and retirement. This is particularly critical in public safety, where the physically demanding and dangerous nature of the work necessitates earlier retirement ages.

Research shows that defined benefit plans are highly effective in attracting and keeping public safety professionals. The research indicates that after the fifth year of service, public safety employee turnover flattens and is incredibly low until a public safety worker reaches retirement eligibility. This data indicates that pension plans are working as intended by retaining workers during their career and helping employees transition to retirement when appropriate.¹

Defined benefit plans provide essential retirement security for those who dedicate their careers to protecting our communities. The law enforcement community is facing significant recruitment and retention challenges. Departments across the country are struggling to stay fully operational while facing rising crime rates. Both ends of the career spectrum are affected, with decreasing numbers of new qualified applicants and increasing retirements and resignations.

To address these challenges and support our public safety professionals, we recommend:

1. Preserving and strengthening defined benefit pension plans for public safety workers.
2. Supporting legislation like Alaska's House Bill 78, which aims to provide public employees an opportunity to participate in a defined benefit retirement plan.

¹ "Alisa Bennett, 'The Role of Defined Benefit Pensions in Recruiting and Retaining Public Safety Professionals,' National Institute on Retirement Security, June 2024, <https://www.nirsonline.org/reports/publicsafety/>."

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3. Ensuring adequate funding for law enforcement departments to maintain competitive compensation packages, including robust pension benefits.

The importance of defined benefit pension plans in recruiting, retaining, and providing retirement security for public safety professionals cannot be overstated. As the West Coast Law Enforcement Coalition, we urge you to prioritize the preservation and enhancement of these crucial benefits.

Strong pension systems not only benefit individual employees but also contribute to the overall safety and well-being of our communities by ensuring a stable, experienced, and dedicated workforce.

We stand ready to collaborate with lawmakers and stakeholders to find actionable solutions that support our public safety professionals and the communities they serve.

Sincerely,

Shaun R Kuzakin

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