

February 21, 2018

Senator Pete Kelly
State Capitol Room 111
Juneau AK, 99801

Senator Pete Kelly,

I have worked in Fire & Emergency services in Alaska since 2011. When I was 18-years-old, I was working on the BP oilfield with CH2MHILL. This is where I got my start in the fire service. I started Volunteering with the BP Fire Department in North Slope, Alaska. After some time, I realized Firefighting appeared to be a desirable and fulfilling path, and being young and eager I sought out to chase it. Shortly after a year working on the oilfield, I resigned and immediately began my journey through the UAF Fire Science program in Fairbanks AK. Spending nearly 3 years in Fairbanks and also working with the University Fire Department and Volunteering at other local departments. I left Fairbanks with a countless number of certifications, qualifications and about 6 years of training and experiences packed into 3. My time there was nothing short of phenomenal. This dense educationally rich environment, primed me, a 22-year-old, from being a know nothing kid, to someone worth hiring at the Anchorage Fire Department.

At the time getting hired the AFD seemed nothing short of dream come true. I say, "at the time" because when you first start, nothing other than simply receiving the job seems important. However, after spending 2 and a half years with the AFD, I realized there is more to this career than "*perform firefighting activities*", as it says in the application. After time, you learn about long term job related health issues and it starts to widen your view of what's important. Important to you and your family. Some of these health issues to include: increased mental health instability, increased chances of many cancers, increase chances in heart disease, decrease hormone sensitivity including testosterone, adrenaline, cortisol and insulin. With all that to think about, the importance of good secure retirement was something that I realized was not just benefit to firefighters, but a necessity. Too many firefighters retire far earlier than most civilian's, due to being run down either mentally, physically or both.

All that being said, I'm not writing asking for sympathy towards firefighters, we are a strong dedicated group of people, and are extremely proud to do what we do. Daily we get to work in the best job in the world, and often have moments of absolute fulfillment in serving our communities. We thank all the people in the government that support us and even the ones who don't, we appreciate everything we have received. Being said, the Tier 4 retirement is not a feasible option for Alaska Firefighters. As you may know, many Fire Departments that have

poor retirements in the lower 48 and especially the east coast, face high employee turnaround. As well as underqualified candidates/ employees. The Fire service is a career, not a job with the means of just making money. The public expects well qualified, well trained, skilled and experienced professionals working day in and day out. In order to have that, departments must combat increasing turnaround. With the retirement system the way it is, turnaround will increase as time moves forward.

Additionally, potential applicants from programs like the UAF Fire Science and others, will begin to look outside of Alaska for work. Thus, losing qualified potential employees to other systems that offer better retirements. Speaking to that as proof, a majority of the people I worked with in the UAF Fire Science program now have career jobs in other states that offer defined benefit retirements. I myself have recently resigned my position as Firefighter with the AFD, in order to accept another job with a department that has a good retirement program. I don't suspect I will be the last. I understand that politics is similar to playing 'Whac-A-Mole', there is always something popping up that needs to be taken care of, and it's certainly never ending. I believe that the retirement system needs be in the center of the radar for our firefighters. I thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I would like to thank you and all the others for your dedication to Alaskan Politics. I hope this letter finds you well.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hunter Bomar', with a stylized, flowing script.

Hunter Bomar