

February 21, 2018

Senator Pete Kelly  
State Capitol Room 111  
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Kelly,

My name is John Jones, and I spent the last 9 years of my life living in Fairbanks, AK. I moved to Fairbanks my sophomore year in high school and fell in love with the state of Alaska. When I graduated from high school I decided to continue my education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. All of my immediate family lives in Fairbanks, so living in Alaska seemed like a no-brainer. I started my career in the fire service at UAF CTC's Fire Academy and immediately fell in love with the job. I began to volunteer at the Steese Fire Dept and work at the University Fire Department. After working at the University Fire Dept, I received a job opportunity at Fairbanks Fire Dept (FFD). I took the job because I love firefighting, I love Fairbanks, AK, and I couldn't imagine that there would be a more perfect opportunity for me.

My first day at FFD I felt like part of the family. They gave me numerous opportunities to grow and improve as a firefighter paramedic. The longer I worked there, I started to hear that it was very important to start investing in retirement at a young age. I began to look more and more into what I would need to contribute to retire. The job of a firefighter paramedic can be hard on your body, and working in Fairbanks in -20 temperatures on a regular basis does not make it any easier. Retirement at an earlier age was becoming more important. Many of the guys I worked with had been hurt on the job at one point or another, so it was a serious consideration. The risk of hurting yourself increases with age and that became a big consideration with retirement.

I lived at home during my employment at FFD, allowing me to save more money. However, I still was not able to put enough money away to retire. I began to tell myself that I was okay with working forever. I believed that I could make ends meet (even if just barely) if I found a desk job after my retirement from the fire department and worked into my 70's.

Although I love my career, my real dream is to raise a family. My fiancée and I knew from the start that we want to have children. With this in mind, I had to decide whether I could afford to continue my job as a firefighter at FFD and still support a family. That was when it became clear that I would need to go to a different department.

My first consideration was Anchorage Fire Department, because my fiancée's family lives there. After talking with some friends at the Anchorage Fire Department, I learned that even moving there would not alleviate my concerns for starting a family and still being able to retire. I realized that it was an issue with the state. If my fiancée and I wanted to have the family we always dreamed of, we would need to look outside of Alaska.

I consulted my Union President about different jobs in other states, and he recommended WA. It was not long after that I received a job offer from the Tacoma Fire Department. The first day that I started working in WA I couldn't believe the benefits I was now receiving. I was a part of a defined benefits retirement plan LEOFF 2. In this plan you receive 2% per year of the average of your highest five salaries, and can retire at the age of 53. It was an immediate weight taken off of my chest, because with my PERS Tier 4 retirement I never thought I would be able to retire in my 50's. I would never have taken the leap to a new state had it not been for the State

of Alaska's retirement in place. It was not manageable for a man in his 20's that had aspirations of having a family.

It was not an easy decision moving out of the state I love. I can still remember the day I told my dad that I wouldn't be living in the same city, or even the same state as him. I have always been close to my family and still am to this day. I wish I could be closer to them. Instead, I am writing to you from my new home in Washington, where I can comfortably raise and provide for my family without concern for what the future holds. I know that by the end of my fire service career I will be able to actually retire, a surety I did not have in Alaska.

Respectfully,

John Jones