



# Fairbanks Fire Department

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**Jim Styers, Fire Chief**

**DATE:** February 21, 2018

**TO:** Senator Pete Kelly

**SUBJECT:** Non-Retirement Retention

Prior to the year 2006, the Fairbanks Fire Department was a job that was in high demand. The department would test for hiring only a single time every other year. The applicant numbers were always over 100. Today we have to test every year. In the past three years our highest applicant count was only at 30. Less than half of our current applicants make it on the hiring list. The number of individuals wanting to work at Fairbanks Fire Department has declined drastically over the last several years.

Of the individuals that Fairbanks Fire does hire, we are seeing them leave to other employment not only in the State of Alaska but also outside the state. For example in 2016 we had six individuals leave Fairbanks Fire, one did retire, three went to better pay and benefits jobs in Alaska, and two found jobs outside Alaska with better pay and benefits. Losing a single firefighter costs an estimated \$45,000. The City will invest six months to train the firefighter to operate as part of the crew. In 2016 this total cost was \$270,000, and of this cost, ONLY \$45,000 was due to retirement.

One main reason Fire Fighters are seeking employment out of State is the lack of a Defined Benefit retirement. Fire fighters have a shortened career due to the physical nature of the work. It doesn't take long for the employees to realize the realities of their future retirement options. With the current retirement structure the firefighters are unable to envision a stable and reliable future.

As a Fire Chief it is my job to ensure the safety and security of the firefighters. Just as I make sure that the day to day operations run safely, I make sure that their futures are protected, from small details like purchasing new hoods that reduce the cancer causing risks to advocating for retirement security. I feel that it's my job to not only protect the firefighters during their careers but to ensure they have a life afterwards to enjoy.

This is not only a City of Fairbanks Fire Department issue. If you would ask around the State, I believe you would find the same issues taking place around the entire State of Alaska.

Sincerely,

James N. Styers, Fire Chief  
City of Fairbanks