

Dear Alaska Legislature

I am writing to you to urge your support of House Bill 79. This bill needs to keep moving through the legislative process. Alaska can't afford to keep putting this topic aside and think, "We will look at this at a later date".

The state is losing highly qualified and motivated Public Safety Personnel due to the lack of a secure retirement. Every department of Public Safety, not only struggles to lure qualified candidates to Alaska to apply for jobs, but struggles to keep them. Once individuals do get hired and begin to learn about what the current state Tier IV retirement system really looks like, they begin looking elsewhere for departments and careers with a more secure retirement system. There are so many other departments, both police and fire that have full pensions and some still even provide full-medical coverage at retirement.

I currently work for The Anchorage Fire Department and was hired Nov, 2007. I am amongst the first group of hires placed in to the Tier IV system. From the beginning it was preached to my group to max out our 457, start a Roth IRA, and contribute to a 401Roth if you can. While some of this is possible, as a new hire and trying to save for a home or support a family this is very difficult to do any of these. But for those that don't and haven't it has become quickly apparent of the shortfall they may be up against when it comes time to retire. Rather than having a set retirement income, those of us in Tier IV will only have what has been contributed to our different accounts. An amount which will have to pay for our cost of living as well as our health care, after a long career in in Public Safety.

I have now seen 3 of my fellow hires leave the largest, most prestigious and probably the highest paying fire department in the state, for other smaller, lower paying departments, but with much more secure retirements. The Anchorage Fire Department and Municipality of Anchorage has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on numerous individuals to hire and train them, to now simply watch them walk out the door and use that experience to get hired someplace else with a more secure future. In the beginning of my career, I also looked at other departments. I applied several places, took one written test, but in the end decided to stay here in Alaska because this is my home. I have spent my entire life here and the majority of my family still resides in the state.

At this point in my career I have too much time to leave and start over someplace else, but I am worried about having to put in 30 years as a firefighter, in order to have enough money saved in various accounts, to be able to support a retirement. Thirty years will put me at 59 years old, which is consistent with a normal retirement age, but it is worrisome to think of trying to maintain the same level of physical and mental demands that will be placed on me as I approach sixty years old.

The state needs to do what they can to help support and provide for a clear and adequate retirement for our hard working and dedicated Public Safety Employees.

I again urge you to keep House Bill 79 moving forward, so that we can provide for our current employees and continue to attract highly qualified and driven individuals to keep the great State of Alaska safe.

Respectively,

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