

Representative Carpenter,

I am a firefighter/paramedic in your district and am writing to you on behalf of House bill 79. Over the past 15 years I have noticed a rise in turnover of firefighters in my department and throughout the state. I believe that this is directly related to the retirement offered to public safety workers. When a vacancy is created, it takes time to hire a replacement and then it takes more time to train him or her to a level that he/she can function independently. I have seen firsthand the reduction in ability to provide service when there are a large number of new firefighters in a station due to the amount of oversight required. Offering a defined benefit plan would encourage people to stay in the state and work to retirement age.

When I first started working at my current fire department, it was normal to see people stay for an entire career of 25+ years. As the retirement system changed and those people receiving defined benefit retirements began to retire, new employees were hired under the defined contribution system. Since this happened, there has been a drastic increase in turnover creating constant vacancies. As the Alaskan fire service is a rather small community, I know this to be an issue throughout the state. We also work with law enforcement on a regular basis and know that they are having the same issues.

As well as the high turnover rate, recruitment has seen a downturn over this same time period. Attracting quality, qualified people for vacant positions is an issue. Most fire departments require some entry level qualifications to apply for a firefighter or paramedic job. When people get these qualifications on their own they are marketable nationwide. There is currently nothing to attract them to stay in the state when they can use the same qualifications to get a job somewhere with a better retirement package.

House bill 79 will go a long way to encourage quality applicants for public safety vacancies as well as retention of these people once hired.

I thank you for your consideration on this issue and thank you for your diligent work in Juneau to make the state a better place for all Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Reed Quinton

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