

From: Benjamin Simonds <bensimonds@me.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 9, 2021 3:24 PM
To: Rep. Andy Josephson <Rep.Andy.Josephson@akleg.gov>
Subject: House Bill 55

March 9, 2021
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Dear Representative Josephson,

My name is Benjamin Simonds and I am a firefighter/paramedic with the Anchorage Fire Department. I am writing to you today to encourage your support of House Bill 55. This year I reach my 16th anniversary as a career firefighter. While I am a Tier III PERS member and this bill does not affect my retirement it does affect my family, friends and the residents of the State of Alaska. I would like to talk to you particularly about the recruitment and retention concerns that we are currently seeing in the Public Safety Sector.

I have spent most of my career as not only a responder but as an educator. My background includes being an adjunct faculty member of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, lead Instructor for the State Fire Marshalls Office of Rural Fire Protection, lead instructor for the VPSO and VPO fire training, Anchorage Fire Department recruit school instructor and was a lead instructor for Central Emergency Services Recruit Fire School for several years prior to moving to Anchorage. All of the previous mentioned experience allows me to consistently see firsthand what others have been saying. That we are losing our members.

The State of Alaska is having a hard time keeping members long term in the Public Safety field. These members are very expensive to be constantly replaced. I would watch time after time motivated men and women become certified in both Fire and EMS training, use that training to get hired at a fire department here in the state and then after a few years of employment become eligible to either test as a lateral hire or move to a department that pays more. While the second reason may not initially seem like a retirement issue it is. While you could potentially argue that anyone would be tempted to move for more money, it becomes more of a need when you do not have a pension to rely on. I have seen an increase in the number of members in the AFD academy that are coming to us from other departments. As someone who came from a small department this continuous loss of members puts a significant financial burden on the cities, boroughs, and fire districts that have to keep hiring and training new members to bring them up to speed. This doesn't even take into account the failure to grow an experienced staff that protects the community. I know we can all agree on the value of experience in any job field.

While HB 55 has a long way to go I encourage you to support this bill and to allow it to continue on. While any change in retirement comes at a cost the savings long term are well worth it not only financially but in keeping members that become seasoned responders. Members that protect our friends and families.

Thank you for your time Sincerely
Ben Simonds