

02/22/2021

Mr. Josephson,

Hello my name is Clayton Lex and I am writing to you today to urge you to support HB 55. I have been a firefighter for the Anchorage Fire Department for the past 10 years. I love my job and I love serving the community I grew up in even more. Getting hired with AFD was a boyhood dream come true and I've never truly wanted to do anything else but be a firefighter.

However, with the current retirement system in place its becoming glaringly obvious to me that this job will not be sustainable for me or my coworkers. Since being hired I've blown out a knee, two shoulders, a wrist, and suffer from chronic back and neck pain. Those injuries are after only 10 years. What is it going to be like for me after a 25 year career and no medical benefits when I retire? Thats not even touching the exposures we're faced with on a daily basis. Fireman are 2/3 more likely to succumb to cancer. That means that fireman are 68% more like to be diagnosed with cancer opposed to the general population having a 22% chance.

Yes, I signed up for this job knowing and accepting these risks, but I also expected myself and my family to be taken care of if the worst happens. That, unfortunately is not the case. I am actively looking at moving on from this career in Anchorage unless changes are made. I will still be a fireman, but with the lack of retirement benefits, unfortunately not here in Alaska. I have been actively searching lateral positions and preparing for the hiring process for other departments in different states that offer a competitive retirement. The training, time, and money that has been invested into me will make me a stand out candidate for another department. I would love to stay in Alaska, this is my home and my heart. But, with my family expanding and a baby on the way, I need to think about the future. So, I will always be thankful for my time here at AFD, but I urge you representatives to make some changes because I will not be the last, this I promise you.

There are many problems associated with the Tier IV system. The cities contribution is less than what we would receive by collecting social security, which by the way we don't even receive in the first place, nor do we receive SBS, or COLA. With such a low contribution it's nearly impossible to save enough money to support ones self or their families. With the increasing costs of health care the no medical benefits upon retirement is the real killer (pun intended). The recruitment process has also seen a major downtick. It's hard enough to convince someone to move to Alaska to work, throw in a terrible retirement system and it becomes nearly impossible.

The men and women of public safety need more sustainability in this career. We don't want to leave but some of us have to leave if this goes unchanged. Please, please, please make this a priority and see this bill to the end. Thank you for your time.