

ANCHORAGE FIRE DEPARTMENT



Austin Quinn-Davidson,
Acting Mayor

Headquarters
100 East 4th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
Phone (907) 267-4900 / Fax (907) 267-4977



Jodie Hettrick
Fire Chief

Representative Andy Josephson
State Capitol Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801

February 19, 2021

Subject: Police and Fire Retirement Legislation

Dear Representative Josephson,

As you are aware, the Anchorage Fire Department (AFD) is the largest fire, EMS, and special rescue emergency response organization in Alaska. Approximately 55% of our current operations workforce belongs to the Tier IV retirement plan. By 2031, we expect close to 100% of that division to be in Tier IV.

While AFD has not experienced the degree of retention issues experienced by law enforcement post Tier IV implementation; we are seeing an increase in the number of departures compared to pre-Tier IV employees and expect this trend to continue. For example, in 2018 we were advised by our local bargaining unit that 18 of our Tier IV firefighters were actively testing with other fire departments in various states. That was unprecedented in the history of our department and has continued through today.

The per/capita rate for resignations to work for other departments is three times the rate of those prior to the implementation of the Tier IV plan. Just in 2020 alone this equated to approximately \$4 million in lost investment in employee hiring, training, and experience. Our investment produces a high-quality candidate which other departments are happy to hire.

The most significant impact of the Tier IV plan on AFD is in recruitment in the 1990s-2000s, it was common to receive 800-1000 applications each time a test was announced. Since 2011, our applications have dropped to an average of 359, with only 244 received in 2019. This is most noticeable in the pool of licensed paramedics. We have had to modify our training program to send current employees to paramedic school. This increases our overtime costs significantly each year due to backfilling the positions vacated by employees in training for up to one year. AFD can no longer successfully compete with departments in other states for talented candidates when the retirement option is limited to the Tier IV plan.

Unless there is a change to the retirement system, we expect the cost to the municipal taxpayer to increase due to the higher attrition rate for Tier IV plan employees. In 2020, four Tier IV firefighters left the organization, one of whom retired at the age of 34, after less than 10 years. For the long-term health of the department and our ability to serve the citizens of Anchorage, a better option must be implemented.

Thank you for considering solutions which will save taxpayer dollars in the long term and improve our ability to deliver high quality services to the community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jodie Hettrick".

Jodie Hettrick, Fire Chief
Anchorage Fire Department