
From: [REDACTED] 2021 8:16 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: FW: HB 55

From: Thomas Wescott <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, April 27, 2021 8:12 AM
To: Rep. Kelly Merrick <Rep.Kelly.Merrick@akleg.gov>
Subject: HB 55

Co-Chair Merrick
I will be on shift today and unable to call in to testify.

It should be no surprise that I am strongly in favor of HB 55. As someone who has worked on this project for years and helped craft this very reasonable plan, I am still certain Alaska needs this fix. The fact that Tier 4 is inadequate is no longer even debated. DOA understands this. Bob Mitchell demonstrated this and our actuary William Fornia has also said as much. We know we have a problem and HB 55 lays out a reasonable solution.

HB 55 has reasonable costs. The employer cost(12%) is 10% less than the 22 % being paid today. It has significantly reduced benefits from past DB tiers in the state of AK. It is built on a more conservative rate of return. Lastly all parties share in the risk of the plan. Employers, employees and retirees share in the risk. There are mechanisms built in to have each group shoulder some of the risk.

HB 55 is modeled after some of the most successful plans in the country. Our goal from the start was to create a plan that could be successful, provide reasonable benefits and have ways to deal with adverse experience. HB 55 does all of that.

Thanks to you and the committee for taking the time to work on this important issue.

Tom

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Thomas A. Wescott

From: Lane Wraith <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 9:26 AM
To: Rep. Kelly Merrick
Subject: House Bill 55

Representative Merrick,

Thank you for your time and your support of emergency responders in Alaska. I would like to take this opportunity to offer my support for HB 55 and a return to a defined benefit retirement for Law Enforcement and other emergency services.

As an 11 year Alaska State Trooper, I am at a decision point of my career where I am trying to decide the best way to provide for my family for the future. We love Alaska and plan on staying for the remainder of our lives. I have watched some of the troopers who I have worked with take their portable defined contribution plan and their excellent training and go work for another agency in the lower 48. A defined benefit plan would help us and others with retirement security. There are people who would like to work here aren't interested due to the lack of a competitive retirement package. Most of you have probably seen the recruitment and retention studies attached to previous bills (SB 212, HB 79) which did not have the opportunity to move forward. Our state has a recruitment and retention problem for first responders. The vacancies throughout the state attest to this. While this bill is not a perfect bill and we would all love a return to Tier 3, this bill goes a long way to fixing the retirement system that is currently not working as an incentive to either bring people in, or keep the ones that do come here. On the whole, most of the first responders I have spoken with are in favor of this bill, especially the tier 4 employees. The state spends a lot of money training law enforcement personnel. When this personnel quits to go work for an agency down south that offers a better retirement, all of that money, that time, that training, is wasted, and a hole is created. I believe this bill strikes a balance of improving the retirement system for first responders with negligible costs.

There is one amendment I would like you to consider which relates to the "buy-in." It appears that most employees who would be eligible to buy-in, have enough in the balance of their PERS DCR to purchase their years of service, however some will be short. I would ask that the bill be amended so that if a first responder is short on the buy-in, that the state make up the balance so the employee would keep their full years of service without financial penalty. This may be a large cost for a small growing family, but a very small cost to the state and may encourage wider participation, which will help with retention. Alternatively, there could be an amendment for the employee who is short to have a reasonable max they could pay. Please push for this bill to move forward and become law.

Thank you,

Lane Wraith

From: Amanda Wraith <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, April 21, 2021 9:09 AM
To: Rep. Kelly Merrick
Subject: We need your help to pass HB 55 out of committee!

Dear Representative Merrick,

My name is Amanda Wraith. Your committee has before you House Bill 55. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my strong support of HB55. Thank you each for making those who place their lives on the line for the citizens of our state every day a top priority!

I believe that HB 55 not only addresses a serious lack of support for our state's first responders, it also addresses a massive waste of Alaska's financial resources! This bill is an inexpensive fix to the money and training resources currently being drained from Alaska as our state hires and trains top responders who soon take that world-class training and experience to the Lower 48, where they are confident of a secure retirement system. This has been happening for years! It needs to stop! Please do all you can to get this bill to the floor where it can be heard. This is not the first time our legislature has had a chance to address this issue! Please do not let this bill stall and die in this committee! We need you to act!

My husband has served as an Alaska State Trooper since 2009. My husband and I love Alaska and look forward to raising our three young sons in this great state, but, as most Alaskans are, we are increasingly concerned with the level of crime and lack of adequate support to recruit and retain well-qualified officers. We also continue to be concerned as we plan for the future and retirement at some point. We have watched many Troopers leave Alaska for lower 48 jobs simply due to the fact that those jobs offer defined benefits packages. That is the major reason we hear from our friends as we say goodbye to great and highly trained, experienced officers who have been trained at great expense to the State of Alaska and who are tremendously valuable in their experience and expertise.

Personally, I hate seeing my community's safety jeopardized and my husband's safety jeopardized by losing experienced officers and possibly serving with fewer officers or less experienced officers. I have been alarmed to watch Matsu Valley crime and call volumes increase and coverage decrease to the point of serious danger of every member of this community and each officer! I also grieve to see our communities underserved by leaving critical posts empty due lack of available officers and the closing of vital posts, such as the Talkeetna post where my husband served until its close.

My husband serves in remote Western Alaska communities which are in desperate need of trained and experienced officers who are able to respond to dangerous situations in dangerous conditions, often without any hope of backup! They do this for all of us! We can provide a reasonable retirement for a lifetime of service in the harshest conditions!

There are some who may not support this bill, but I would like to clearly state that those who already have defined benefits do not represent officers and families like ours, who do not and who are an asset at great risk of being lost to our great state. Please support HB 55. As you each consider the most responsible use of Alaska's limited financial resources, please consider the safety of our communities. Also, please, consider the folly of using our tax dollars to train first responders for other states who clearly see their value. Thank you again for supporting those who keep us all safe!

Sincerely,

Amanda Wraith, for one small Alaska family that needs your support!

[REDACTED]