

Testimony in Support of SB 2239

House Government and Veterans Affairs

Good morning Chairman Schauer and members of the committee. My name is Sharon Schiermeister. I am a retired state employee and I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 2239.

I am in favor of this bill as it provides a cost-effective approach to put the PERS Defined Benefit (DB) Plan on a path to becoming 100% funded. Achieving sound financial status provides assurance to retirees that the benefits we have been promised are secure.

Included with my testimony is background information on the funding challenges the plan experienced as a result of the financial crisis in 2008-09, the proposed recovery plan, and actions taken by the Legislature from 2011 - 2021. The history shows how difficult it has been to pass contribution increases. There were several sessions where the requested contribution increases were given a favorable recommendation from the Legislative Employee Benefits Committee, included in the Governor's budget, and passed out of one chamber, but still failed. Even in years with a budget surplus, the additional contributions were not funded. SB 2239 requires employers to contribute the actuarially determined contribution rate, which will be based on the actual experience of the plan, and insure the plan is always funded appropriately.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this bill. It provides a fiscally sound approach to get the DB plan back to 100% funded status, allowing the plan to pay all benefits as promised. I am respectfully requesting a DO PASS recommendation on SB 2239.

PERS Recovery Plan

In the 2008/2009 fiscal year the financial market had a major correction that was preceded by the tech market collapse in 2001-2002. However, the most significant effect occurred in 2008/2009 when the PERS plan lost about 24.5%. The financial consultant to the State Investment Board, which manages the PERS assets, reported that out of 224 years of US stock performance only 4 years were worse than the returns in 2008. What the plan experienced was truly a unique and significant event. As a result of this dramatic downturn in the financial markets, the long term funded status of PERS was affected and projections showed the plan could become insolvent in approximately 2040. After a significant amount of study, a proposal was brought forward to increase the contributions by 8% over the period from January 2012 to January 2015 which was projected to close this funding deficit. It became known as the PERS 4-year recovery plan and was based upon the concept that the recovery should be shared between the employer and employee. As proposed, the State would pay approximately 25%, the political subdivision employers would pay 25% and the employees would pay the remaining 50%. Essentially, this was a 50/50 split between employers and employees. It was proposed to be spread over 4 years to reduce the effect of the increase in any given year on either party. The Teachers Fund For Retirement (TFFR) also had a similar recovery plan. This proposal came together in SB 2108 that was considered during the 2011 session. This proposal was intended to accomplish three objectives:

1. To stop the downward trend in the funded status of the plan
2. To stabilize the plan
3. To put the plan on a course back to 100% funded status

That session, the Legislature approved the first two years of the recovery plan which included the 2012 and 2013 contribution increases. This stopped the downward trend in the funded status and stabilized the plan. It should be noted that the Legislature passed the full 4 year recovery plan for TFFR and they are now projected to be fully funded by the year 2044.

In 2013 PERS proposed the last two years of the recovery plan contribution increases in SB 2059. It received a favorable recommendation from the Legislative Employee Benefits Committee and was included in the Governors Executive Budget Recommendation. The bill introduced by PERS did not pass, but the third year of the recovery plan was added to HB 1452 in conference committee and passed.

In 2015 PERS proposed in HB 1080 the last year of the recovery plan contribution increases along with some benefit modifications. This included changes to the final average salary calculation, early retirement benefit reduction and changing the Rule of 85 to Rule of 90 with minimum retirement age of 60. The bill was given “no recommendation” by the Legislative Employee Benefits Committee, and was included in the Governors Executive Budget Recommendation. The bill did not pass; however, the benefit changes were added in conference committee on the OMB bill at the end of the session and passed.

PERS submitted HB 1053 in 2017 for the last year of the recovery plan contribution increases. The bill received a favorable recommendation from the Legislative Employee Benefits Committee but was not included in the Governors Executive Budget Recommendation due to the fiscal constraints facing the State. The bill did not pass.

PERS submitted 3 bills in the 2019 session to address the funding concerns of the plan. This included SB 2048 for the last year of the recovery plan contribution increases, SB 2047 to reduce the benefit multiplier for new employees, and SB 2046 to discontinue the Retiree Health Insurance Credit (RHIC) program for new employees and direct the 1.14% employer contribution to the DB plan. These bills all received a favorable recommendation from the Legislative Employee Benefits Committee and the contribution increase was included in the Governors Executive Budget Recommendation. The bills to reduce the multiplier and discontinue the RHIC passed, but the contribution increase bill did not pass.

PERS submitted 2 bills in the 2021 session to address the funding concerns of the plan. This included SB 2042 to have employers pay the actuarially determined employer contribution and SB 2046 for the last year of the recovery plan contribution increases. Both bills received a favorable recommendation from the Legislative Employee Benefits Committee and the contribution increase was included in the Governors Executive Budget Recommendation. Both bills failed to pass.