

HOUSE GOVERNMENT AND VETERAN'S AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE AUSTEN SCHAUER, CHAIRMAN
JANUARY 30, 2025

PATRICK N. BOHN, RETIRED LAW ENFORCEMENT
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1371

My name is Pat Bohn and I am writing in support of HB 1371 relating to a Health Insurance Benefit Program for retired peace officers. I retired from the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation as the Director for Parole and Probation in 2022 after serving 32 years in corrections/law enforcement with 27 of those years as a licensed peace officer in North Dakota.

The timing for this bill is excellent as our country faces a law enforcement personnel crisis. The profession is not experiencing a high volume of very qualified applicants. Agencies are still paying hiring and retention bonuses. With the recent move by the state to a defined contribution retirement program from a defined benefit program, I anticipate fewer people will serve 30+ year careers. I believe adding this retirement benefit for peace officers will help improve recruiting and retention of highly qualified and skilled peace officers to keep your communities safe and respond to the call when you or your loved ones have an emergency.

As I look back on my career, I'm grateful for all the people I served with and so many stakeholders that supported our work that have become friends, along with all the experiences. I enjoyed the work but after 32 years, I was burned out. Law enforcement and corrections work is not a job that you leave after the workday is over. The job is a lifestyle. You live it 365 days a year 24/7. You are on constant alert trying to prevent or react to the next problem or human tragedy by planning, training, reflecting, learning, listening, talking, strategizing and problem-solving. There are many successes in the career but the culmination of tragedies and stress take their toll.

I'll never forget the day in October 2022 just as I was winding down my career and transitioning to retirement. I took my two grandkids and my daughter to Papa's Pumpkin Patch. We spent a couple hours that nice fall afternoon with the kids playing on the haybales, the corn pit, and a host of other activities. We then left and I was driving south on River Road and then it happened, I got emotional as it dawned on me that it was the first time in nearly three decades that I was full present in the moment with my daughter and grandkids. No phone calls, no texts, no thinking about problems or issues at work that needed attention and it felt good, even though my next thoughts went to guilt about how much I was not fully present for so many other things for so long.

There are various studies showing law enforcement officer's life expectancy is much lower than the general population. Unfortunately, North Dakota just recently had to active duty officers' die. One in Bismarck and the other in Minot. I'm sure many others will be talking about the challenges of the job and the data, so I'll leave that to them as I just wanted to share with you a real experience.

I do believe there are some opportunities to consider as you weigh the viability of this bill. A few ideas include:

- Require a retiree to contribute to the health insurance policy in the amount of 10% or something in that range.
- Require the retiree to contribute their entire Retiree Health Insurance Credit that current retired PERS participants have earned.
- Restrict the time for coverage to no more than 10 years.
- Offer solely to those who have participated in and retired from the ND PERS system.

In closing, we need courageous action by leaders such as you to change the trajectory of the law enforcement profession by incentivizing and rewarding those who spend career answering the call in maybe the most traumatic moment in your life or your community. Thank you.