



March 6th, 2025

Senate State and Local Government Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: Support for HB 1112

Chairman Roers & Committee Members,

Please accept this letter as support for HB 1112. This bill recognizes state-employed firefighters as eligible ND PERS Public Safety plan participants. Today, only firefighters employed by political subdivisions can receive this benefit. Although we are thankful for inclusion in this state-operated system, it is only right that state employees who perform this job function receive equal access.

A primary reason for the existence of the Public Safety portion of the PERS program is to provide a retirement plan that aligns with the job's extreme physical demands. Our state firefighters work alongside the firefighters of the political subdivisions and perform much of the same work. Although our state firefighters primarily perform wildfire firefighting duties, they are often tasked with structural firefighting responsibilities. Many wildfires spread to structures and all wildfires pose this risk. In the end, the job performance requirements and expectations are the same. Arguably, the work performed by our state-employed Forest Service firefighters is much more labor-intensive. Their incidents often last weeks and require extreme physical exertion over much longer periods of time.

In addition to the job's physical demands, another primary reason for this benefit is the significant risk that our firefighters face of suffering from long-term health complications. These long-term health risks often involve cancer and cardiovascular disease. After a career of providing emergency response, the development of these health conditions often makes alternative employment difficult at best. At its most basic level, the ND PERS Public Safety plan is about caring for those who have committed their lives to taking care of us.

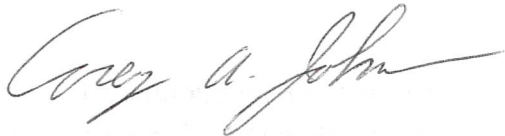
Every year, the state-employed firefighters of the ND Forest Service demonstrate their need and value to our state. In 2024, the ND Forest Service was crucial to fighting the wildfires that affected McKenzie and Williams County. In addition to the boots on the ground work that they performed, their organization has worked with all of the services throughout the state to

provide training. Without their efforts, these fires would undoubtedly have been much worse. 2024 was not a stand-alone or outlying year. Wildfires occur every year in North Dakota, and the reality is that they are happening more frequently and have more significant impacts. This increase in severity amplifies the need to provide for our Forest Service Firefighters and recognize their contributions to Public Safety in North Dakota.

Firefighting is not a simple job. Every year, firefighters throughout the country lose their lives in the line of duty. This job is inherently dangerous. To perform it well, you must make a significant commitment to training. Firefighters are lifelong learners. Technology and tactics are constantly evolving, and having staff with experience is critically important to accomplishing our tasks safely so that everyone can go home to their families. Having adequate benefits matching job demands is critical to recruitment and retention.

Thank you for your time and efforts in considering this important piece of legislation. I respectfully ask for your support by recommending HB 1112 as a "do pass" to the Senate floor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Corey A. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Corey" being the most prominent.

Corey A. Johnson, Assistant Chief of Operations
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