

69TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

House Bill 1112 - "Relating to membership of the NDPERS Public Safety Defined Benefit Retirement Plan."

Senate State and Local Government

March 6, 2025

Testimony Submitted by:

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Purpose:

Chairman Roers, members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee, my purpose in submitting this testimony is to support the request to include state firefighters in subsection 8 of section 54-52-01, section 54-52-06.4, subsection 3 of section 54-52-17, and subsection 4 of section 54-52-17 of the North Dakota Century Code. Current language does not provide for an opportunity for state firefighters, including North Dakota Forest Service (NDFS) firefighters, to participate in the NDPERS Public Safety Defined Benefit Retirement Plan. This legislation seeks to remove barriers to participation.

NDFS wildland firefighters are just that firefighters. Firefighters employed by the state, not a district or community. But rest assured they are highly trained and great assets to all fire departments in the state.

NDFS firefighters are not excluded from the dangers of exposures to hazards typical of firefighters employed by a district or community simply because they are employed by the state of North Dakota. The state also has no issues calling on them in a time of need. So, it makes sense that the state includes them in the benefits that will assure they are here when needed.

Firefighting especially wildland firefighting has always been a younger person's occupation due to the toll it takes on the body. That issue is double edged as #1 injury or health concerns force retirement #2 replacements without proper incentives become harder to recruit. Offering eligibility to the NDPERS Public Safety Defined Benefit Retirement Plan goes a long way to addressing those issues.

The fall of 2024 as well as the spring of 2021 showed the entire state fire services that being prepared will be and should be priority #1. We continue to see each wildland fire season be the worst ever seen in our state and the NDFS firefighters where prepared and responded with the professionalism and knowledge to take the task on putting others above themselves. This is a way to help say thanks and ensure they stay in our state.

Simply said offering eligibility to the NDPERS Public Safety Defined Benefit Retirement Plan is simply another tool to help recruit and retain personnel.

Please again take this testimony as support for HB1112 from the Dickinson Rural Fire Protection District.