

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the appropriations committee.

My name is Austen Schauer representing **District 13** in West Fargo.

The **backbone** of **HB 1183** is fair treatment for North Dakota's law enforcement along with retention and recruitment for our law enforcement personnel.

During the **DAPL** uprising and many other emergency situations before and after, members of multiple law enforcement agencies have responded.

And with **clear evidence**, they have done their job.

They all work under stress, danger, and challenges of the job.

However, they are **not** working under the same retirement plan.

They are being treated **differently**.

HB 1183 aims to change that.

Under the current **BCI** plan, agents working for the Attorney General can retire at age **55**.

And this is good because we know through various studies and research, that the demands and intensity of law enforcement are built for younger people, **not** 55- to 65-year-olds despite what our minds may tell us.

We also know **statistically**, the life expectancy for those in law enforcement is shorter than those **not** in law enforcement.

And therein is reason why **HB 1183** was advanced by both the **Employee Benefits** and the **GVA** committees.

HB 1183 will take approximately **400** sworn officers from the state and move them into the **BCI retirement plan** which will be renamed the **Peace Officers Retirement Plan**.

These officers are mostly from North Dakota **Parole and Probation**, North Dakota **Game and Fish** and North Dakota **Parks and Rec**.

Several more are **investigators** working for the North Dakota **Insurance department** and other state agencies.

They are trained. They are skilled. They educated.

Most have a four-year degree in criminal justice.

They are certified and licensed through North Dakota post-board.

They all wear a **badge**.

But these **400 peace officers** are currently under the **main PERS plan** and cannot retire until **age 65**.

Under **HB 1183**, these officers will be moved to the new **Peace Officers Retirement** plan and can retire at age **55**.

However, that doesn't mean they will.

Because of an IRS rule, these **400 officers** cannot begin drawing on the retirement plan **without penalty** until they are **59 and a half**.

They can, however, retire from law enforcement at **55**...and work at a less stressful state job...before drawing full retirement benefits four and a half years later.

I must mention, **HB 1183** does not impact **Highway Patrol** as they have their own retirement plan.

To the point of **fairness**.

All North Dakota peace officers are protecting our people, responding to emergencies, carrying out the laws we pass, going after the bad actors yet the state treats them **differently** when it comes to retirement benefits.

We believe that needs to change and it will under **HB 1183**.

To the second point of **recruiting and training**.

The **400 peace officers** are highly sought after by other agencies in today's **employee driven** market.

Why? Because they are trained and experienced.

It takes a considerable amount of time, effort, and money to get a peace officer up to speed.

We have all seen what happens with law enforcement is not trained properly.

Once our state officers are trained, we need to retain them as best as possible from federal, county, city, and other agencies who would "**poach**" or "**scalp**" them as was mentioned by the bill sponsor.

If our benefits are not on par for all, we open a big **door** to losing trained officers and who's fault is that?

Finally, a look at the fiscal note.

We believe the fiscal note is **wrong** despite efforts to fix it with **PERS**.

Two glaring errors.

The first is **ID number 125** regarding the Attorney General's line item.

HB 1183 is not adding one **BCI** agent onto the retirement plan so you can remove the **\$853, 209** expense.

Glaring error number two: **ID number 540** regarding the Adjutant Generals' line item.

HB 1183 does **not** impact any guard member's retirement plan so you can remove the **\$179, 643** expense.

The **accurate** Fiscal Note should be **\$2.9 million**.

To summarize, **HB 1183** will keep **all** North Dakota law enforcement under one retirement plan. The only caveat being the **IRS** rule.

And number two, **HB 1183** will help in recruiting and retaining much need peace officers.

This is a stand-alone issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and committee members. I stand open for questions.