

March 9, 2023

Chairperson and committee members:

My name is Valerie Barbie and I have been a ND employee since 2007. Please oppose closing the NDPERS retirement plan to new hires and do the right thing by keeping the promises made to public employees.

As a state employee I was a temporary employee for nine years. I was unable to participate in the pension plan during those years due to the low pay while I paid for my health insurance premiums out of pocket. These years have detrimentally impacted my retirement goals. I held onto my position in hopes that eventually it would turn permanent as working in public service in my profession was my long-term goal. In 2015 I was finally brought on as a permanent employee and since I have changed state agencies and have increased my responsibilities dramatically. Rather than leave ND or go into the private sector I wanted to stay in employment with the state of ND. The pension and healthcare benefits are good incentives to stay.

North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System's (NDPERS) defined-benefit pension plan is a valuable recruiting tool for North Dakota job growth and provides stable retirement savings for our public workers. This defined-benefit plan provides a guaranteed monthly payment to retired public workers, allowing for financial stability and security to the employees and the communities in which they live. The plan is also a significant recruiting tool that keeps public employee salaries and benefits competitive. We must consider the future of our state and its employees.

House Bill 1040 would close the defined-benefit pension plan and cost North Dakota taxpayers \$5.5 billion. On the other hand, Senate Bill 2239 would invest in our current defined-benefit pension plan and preserve the popular benefit for under \$1 billion. Not only does SB 2239 maintain the defined benefit option and invest in the pension plan, it is also clearly the more fiscally responsible choice.

If we eliminate these benefits the only benefit to being a state employee is the concept of being in service to the public and that does not pay our bills or provide us a future with the dignity that North Dakotans deserve. We are already not guaranteed raises, bonuses, or equitable pay to the private sector. How does it serve our fellow residents to decrease the incentives to work in these difficult positions that are frequently understaffed and overworked as it stands.

Valerie Barbie