



# OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters  
AFL-CIO CLC

February 28, 2023

Chair Dacia Grayber, Vice-Chair Lewis, Vice-Chair Tran, members of the committee:

We are proud to represent the 3700 professional firefighters within the State of Oregon. Everyday those 3700 members go to work to put their lives at risk caring for the citizens of Oregon. This has been abundantly clear during situations such as the COVID pandemic and wildfires of the September 2020 conflagrations which affected so much of our state. During this past weekend, firefighters again showed their resiliency and commitment to the communities that they serve while large amounts of snow and ice took hold in our communities. Extreme measures were taken, including putting critical patients in fire engines to transport them to the hospital.

Although we represent 3700 members, the number of firefighters that should be in a state the size of Oregon is closer to 5000 per National Fire Protection Association recommendations. We already have an underserved state. Of the 3700 firefighters that are currently working, 1200 of those members could retire at this time. This puts Oregon and its local jurisdictions in extreme jeopardy of losing the most tenured fire fighters to retirement.

House Bill 2296 is a simple bill that allows those members that are eligible to retire to be able to do so and still keep employment with their current employer. The impacts to the employer retaining these seasoned employees include giving a predictable retirement date, creating a predictable time to hire and train a new employee. The workback decreases the unfunded actuarial liability (UAL) by applying the savings of not paying the fire fighters PERS or employer portion instead applying it to the employers UAL.

House Bill 2296 creates a relationship between an employee and employer that is mutually beneficial to both parties. The workback or WAR is a voluntary program directed by the employer. This relates to the employee, as they can still retire as they want and not be forced to be a part of House Bill 2296 if they do not want to be.

One example of a Fire District employer, Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, has saved over \$2,000,000 in taxpayer funds since this program began in 2019.

This workback program has been in effect since 2019 within the fire service and is very successful. HB 2296 gives employers the needed short term retirement predictability and decrease in the employers UAL. The fire fighter receives all contractual benefits except the PERS IAP and increases to their pension.

We appreciate the work that the committee has taken on this important piece of legislation and meeting with us to explain the mechanisms of the bill. We respectfully request that this come out of committee with a unanimous do pass recommendation to the House Floor . We are available to answer any additional questions that you might have.

Karl Koenig  
President

Alan Ferschweiler  
Legislative Director