



OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO CLC

Senate Committee on Labor and Business
Chair Kathleen Taylor
Vice Chair Daniel Bonham
Labor and Business Committee Members

March 10, 2025

Madame Chair and Mr. Vice Chair,

For the record I'm Karl Koenig, President of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council. We represent the over 3800 career professional fire fighters, paramedics, prevention and wildland personnel.

We are testifying in support of Sente Bill 902 with -1 amendment dated 3/7/2025. We are interesting time in public safety, whether we are speaking to keep our incumbent members in this diverse field or attracting interest in joining these public safety professions. We are experiencing a several unanticipated challenges that were not discussed or even contemplated at the start of the OPSRP retirement level. The first is people leaving the public safety employment for other careers. For years, once in PERS you timed out and retired from public safety with a fair pension and the ability retire with dignity, with a less than 5% leaving the public safety employment space. Very little turnover statistically. Now these numbers have doubled and even tripled in some public safety careers, and we believe part of this data is due to the length of service requirements. Next is the competitive nature of those expressing an interest in public safety careers have choices, California with a 50-year age minimum and higher 3% multiplier. Washington who shares our current 53-year age minimum with again, a higher multiplier through the middle years of employment to 2.75%. Seldomly, have we had to compete state to state for selling our career positions throughout Oregon. Higher salaries, better staffing and increase retirement contributions are challenges we must meet to be competitive in these professions.

We have been before this committee and the entire Legislature speaking to different solutions to the “attract and retain” challenge. This reduction in age to meet the minimum time on the job combining that with a reduction of age. Currently our Police and Fire OPSRP members must work to one of three levels to receive a non-penalized retirement. They are 55 years regardless of years of service, 30 years of consecutive service, or 53 years of age and at least 25 years of service. Senate Bill -1 reduces the final 53 years of age and 25 years of service to 50 years of age. SB 902 -1 makes Oregon more competitive in overall compensation to attract and retain our public safety professionals. The other challenges are staffing, we have the same number of fire fighters on duty in the state’s largest City, Portland, in 1990, 168 per day. Those representative numbers repeat throughout the Oregon. Not having enough professionals on duty results in longer response times, longer Key Performance Indicators (KPI), increased injuries, PTSD increases due to call volume and call types. None of which were contemplated when OPSRP was legislated in 2003.

This proposal is not without cost. We asked PERS and Milliman for a benefit cost estimate given the reduction in age proposal. With the reduction in age to 50 and 25 years of service the overall impact to employers with Police and Fire members is .43% increase of pay and another .04% to General Service employers including PERS T1 and T2 members. The UAL is estimated at \$80 Million additional to implement this proposal. While not free this is a fractional increase in employer rates to retain and attract the next generation of public safety professionals.

Our advocacy and this proposal is no surprise, but a piece of the solution to keep our public safety professionals fairly compensated and a respectful retirement.

We encourage a yes vote in committee on Senate Bill 902-1 dated March 7, 2025, acknowledging the commitment of every public safety professional in Oregon, both incumbent and for the future.

Respectfully,

Karl Koenig

Karl Koenig

President

Oregon State Fire Fighters Council