



KANSAS STATE COUNCIL OF FIRE FIGHTERS



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Testimony of Robert S. Wing

My name is Robert S. Wing. I am a captain in the Fire Department of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas. I have been a fire fighter for 35 years. I am also Business Manager of the International Association of Fire Fighters, Local 64 and President of the Kansas State Council of Fire Fighters. I appear here today to speak in support of House Bill No. 2263.

The intent of this bill is to amend the Kansas Police and Firemen's Retirement System so as to remove the 80% cap on pensions earned under this system. Under the KP&F Retirement System, participants earn a retirement benefit equal to 2.5 percent of the participant's final average salary multiplied by the number of years of credited service. However, the current statute states that the retirement benefit cannot exceed 80% of such member's final average salary. Thus, police or fire fighters with more than 32 years of service accrue no additional benefit.

The employees that I represent believe that this leads to the early retirement of many of our most skilled and senior employees. The experience gained by seasoned police and fire fighter is invaluable in providing the services that our communities expect. Many of our fire fighters retire upon attainment of the 80% retirement



maximum. However, in many cases, these employees are still of working age and simply embark on another career. Thus, skilled fire fighters and police employees are lost to our communities because of this cap.

Additionally, the fire fighters that I represent believe that the cap is unfair.

Currently, there are only 2 retirement systems in our State with a cap, the KP&F and the Judicial Retirement System. For example, the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS), which covers the vast majority of public employees in Kansas, has no benefit cap. Long serving employees covered under KPERS continue to accrue retirement benefits for each year that they continue to work. Under the KP&F, police or fire fighters who work beyond 32 years serving their communities accrue no additional retirement benefits. Further, although the 7% employee contribution is reduced to 2% of wages after attainment of the 80% retirement benefit, that is still 2% of wages being contributed by employees for which there is no benefit gained. This seems unfair to us.

I am not an actuary. However, it is my understanding that the impact of such a change will be minimal to KP&F. The amendment would include a 7% level employee contribution for all years of employment. Thus, an employee would continue to contribute 7% of his or her wages until their retirement. Additionally, employees would work longer if they could accrue benefits for all years worked and thus, benefits would be paid out for fewer years. I am sure that you will be presented with expert testimony as to the actuarial calculations concerning the cost of the change.

In summary, the men and women that I represent work hard to serve their communities. There is much to be learned on our jobs and experience is our most important asset. We need to keep our most seasoned employees in order to train those that come behind us. We believe that the proposed amendment would encourage senior police and fire fighters to remain on their departments serving their community without significant additional costs.

I will be happy to answer any questions that you have. Thank you for your time and attention.