

Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear me out about the concerns I have with bills HF 1234 and SF 1959.

Throughout the past several years and even as this bill works its way through the committee process, there have been very targeted news articles to continue to vilify Police Officers. I hope you won't judge us by the negative perceptions against our group, but will see all of us here as individuals, individuals who are real people, who have families, who help their neighbors, and who help out in their communities. My concerns with the proposed bills have to do with some of the seemingly punitive actions that the bills will enact against PERA members receiving a disability benefit.

I have always tried to do the right things in my life. I have treated others as I wished to be treated, helped out when and where I could, and served in a metro community as a Police Officer for 17 years. During that time, I had some amazing opportunities, I grew my education, and was sent to trainings around the Country. On the streets I was able to hone my communication, negotiation, and empathy skills. I also dealt with some of the worst situations imaginable.

After several years of working as a Police Officer, I got married and started my family. As I continued working, I became more distant from my family and while I was at home I was bitter and angry. Eventually my wife convinced me to get some help. After over a year of therapy and medication didn't seem to be improving my situation, I took a leave from work, eventually being accepted by PERA and receiving a disability benefit.

My initial process to receive the disability benefit was arduous, and I almost gave up several times. When I finally started to receive the benefit, I was able to breathe a sigh of relief and begin the long process of healing myself and my family. I was also able to get a part time job to try and fill the new void in my life, and try to feel purpose again.

With the proposals in the bills, those who are working will be penalized, and those who are receiving benefits will be forced to reapply annually. I can see many who are working, may stop to avoid paying the penalty. This may seem like it would negatively impact the fund, but, I imagine without purpose, many will end their lives, thus benefiting the fund. The reapplication process will make it easier to deny recipients, or make the process seem so daunting that they will also give up on it, thus benefiting the fund.

Fiduciary goals should be outweighed by the well-being of other humans. There HAS to be a better way.

The consequences to a group that is already so damaged could be devastating. I hope you are able to see us as individuals, as productive members of society, as fellow humans, and deny these bills.

I hope to be involved in future discussions or proposals to assist with more thoughtful, helpful ways to help our current and former First Responders, and Citizens of the State.

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