

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1055

As Passed House:

March 6, 2023

Title: An act relating to public safety employees' retirement plan membership for public safety telecommunicators.

Brief Description: Concerning public safety employees' retirement plan membership for public safety telecommunicators.

Sponsors: Representatives Stokesbary, Ormsby, Leavitt, Simmons, Goodman, Lekanoff, Rule, Robertson, Bronoske, Bergquist and Davis; by request of Select Committee on Pension Policy.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 1/16/23, 2/13/23 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/6/23, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds individuals who are members of the Public Employees' Retirement System Plans 2 and 3, and whose primary responsibility is to respond and process 911 emergency calls for law enforcement, fire, medical, or other public safety services to the Public Safety Employees' Retirement System.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Chopp, Connors, Couture, Davis, Dye, Fitzgibbon,

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Hansen, Harris, Lekanoff, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Sandlin, Schmick, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Steele, Stonier and Tharinger.

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Background:

The Public Safety Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) was created in 2004 and opened to members on July 1, 2006. The PSERS provides retirement benefits for state and local government employees who work in positions with law enforcement and correctional duties but are not eligible for membership in the Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' Retirement System (LEOFF), as well as employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Social and Health Services that provide nursing care to, or ensure the custody or safety of, offender and patient populations in state institutions.

Members of the PSERS with at least 20 years of service will be eligible for full retirement benefits from age 60, five years earlier than the regular retirement age in Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) Plans 2 and 3. Members of the PSERS with 20 years of service may also opt for early retirement beginning at age 53 with a 3 percent reduction in benefits per year of early retirement. Members of the PSERS also have disability benefits similar to LEOFF, rather than PERS.

Membership in the PSERS is restricted by an individual's employer and by specific job criteria. The PSERS employers are defined as the departments of Corrections, Natural Resources, Social and Health Services, Veterans Affairs, the State Parks and Recreation Commission, Gambling Commission, Washington State Patrol, Liquor and Cannabis Board, county corrections departments, and the corrections departments of municipalities not classified as first-class cities.

Summary of Bill:

Individuals who are members of the PERS Plans 2 and 3, and whose primary responsibility is to respond and process 911 emergency calls for law enforcement, fire, medical, or other public safety services are added to employees eligible to participate in the PSERS.

Eligible employers are defined as those that participate in the PERS system, and some of whose employees' primary responsibility is to receive, process, transmit, or dispatch 911 emergency and nonemergency calls.

For eligible employees employed before June 1, 2024, a window of time between January 1, 2024, and March 1, 2024, is provided for the person to elect to remain a member of PERS 2 or 3, or transfer to PSERS for periods of future service. If a member does not choose to transfer to PSERS, they remain in PERS. Members hired on or after June 1, 2024, become members of PSERS.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on June 1, 2024.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The retirement plans are generally organized around the jobs employees perform. The 911 operators seem like a good fit for the Public Safety Employees' Retirement System (PSERS), especially after listening to the compelling testimony delivered to the Select Committee on Pension Policy. Originally, 911 dispatchers were placed into the Public Employees' Retirement System as the jobs were viewed as secretarial, and the stress of the job was unrecognized. The stress and trauma over the phone can be just as severe as what is experienced in person. After 30 years as a dispatcher, this bill responds to the needs of the workers at the first point of contact with people in crisis. Image streaming adds complexity, risk, and workload. The PSERS is the most appropriate retirement plan for these workers. The job of a dispatcher is not physically dangerous, but only three out of 273 employees hired by Bellevue 911 have reached retirement. Post traumatic stress disorders, anxiety, and depression are real risks for 911 operators.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Drew Stokesbary, prime sponsor; Erin Gauthier, Teamsters Local 117; Katy Myers, Washington Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials and National Emergency Number Association; James Schrimpsheer, Washington State Fraternal Order of Police; Nicholas Curry; and Mary Keefe.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.