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KANSAS STATE COUNCIL OF FIRE FIGHTERS



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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS • KANSAS AFL-CIO • CENTRAL LABOR BODIES

Testimony of Robert S. Wing

Re: Senate Bill No. 241

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 41 years. I am also President of the Kansas State Council of Fire Fighters and the Business Manager of the International Association of Fire Fighters, Local 64. I appear here today to speak in support of Senate Bill No. 241.

The intent of this bill is to amend the Kansas Police and Firemen's Retirement System so as to remove the current 90 percent 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 participants final average salary multiplied by the number of years credited service. However, the current statute states that the retirement benefit cannot exceed 90 percent of such member's final average salary. Thus, police of fire fighters with more than 36 years of service accrue no additional benefit.

The employees that I represent believe that this leads to the early retirement of some of our most skilled and senior employees. The experience gained by seasoned police and fire fighters is invaluable in providing the services that our communities both deserve and expect. Many of our fire fighters retire upon attainment of the 90 percent 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 the 90 percent cap.

Additionally, the fire fighters that I represent believe that the cap is unfair. Currently, there are only two 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 36 years serving their communities accrue no additional retirement benefits yet continue to contribute into the system as though a benefit was being gained. In this instance, the Supreme Court ruled long ago that employees who make full contributions to the system must receive a corresponding benefit for the employee's contributions.

I am not an actuary. However, it is my understanding that the impact of such a change will be minimal. The amendment would continue a level employee contribution for all years of

all years of employment. Additionally, employees may 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 women and men in the fire service 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 junior officers 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 may have. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert S. Wing
President, Kansas State Council of Fire Fighters
Business Manager, IAFF Local 64