

After reading the *PERS Policy Paper – Police & Fire Classification*, that was submitting as opposing testimony to SB 425, I was truly offended and dismayed by their disregard of what we as Emergency Public Safety Dispatchers (EPSD) /911 telecommunicators do.

Firstly, I feel that PERS is purposely attempting to mislead the committee by stating that EPSD's and 911 telecommunicators do not qualify as "police officers" under federal tax code (72(t)(10)(B), which states, **" 'Qualified Public Safety Employee' is defined as any employee of a state or political subdivision of a state who provides police protection, firefighting services, or emergency medical services."** And, under federal tax code (415(b)(i)) which states, **"a full-time employee of any police department or fire department that is organized and operated by the state, Indian tribal government, or political subdivision..." who's credited with at least 15 years of service as a full-time employee.**

I personally work for a state agency that provides police protection throughout the state. I know many of my colleagues work for police departments or county sheriff's department. I have worked for the state for over 15.5 years providing a service to the citizens of Oregon who need police services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. I am stymied as to how that does not qualify under either of the above definitions.

Secondly, PERS's argument of, "Cost for P&F Benefits PERS P&F members are eligible to retire at an earlier age and their retirement benefit is calculated using a higher factor. These enhanced benefits (as well as some other provisions) mean that P&F status raises the cost of the benefits members earn while in that status by 4-5% of payroll. **Those costs increase further if existing General Service (non-P&F) members move into the P&F classification..."** We are not talking about every person classified as General Service. We are talking about those of us who fall under the definitions above who directly work to provide **"police protection, firefighting services, or emergency medical services."**

When one talks about retiring "early," PERS only uses Tier 1 employee (those hired prior to 1996) as an example. Yes, Tier 1 employees can retire at the age of 58 years after working for 25 years, with full benefits. However, there are two other Tiers that PERS fails to mention and who's retirement ages and length of service increase by tier.

According to the PERS website, <https://www.oregon.gov/pers/MEM/Pages/Benefit-Component-Comparisons.aspx>, Tier 2 members (those hired between 1/1/96 and 8/28/2003) under General Service must work 30 years or 60 years of age to receive full benefits. P&F Tier 2 members can retire at age 50 or 55 with 25 years of service. Lastly, for those of who were employed under the OPSRP (anyone hired after 8/28/2003) must work until they are 65 years old or have 30 years of service. P&F under the OPSRP can retire at 60 years old or have 30 years of service. The benefits calculation factor also is decreased by tier, with tier 1 providing the most benefits, and OPSRP providing the least and 1.5% for general service and 1.8% for P&F.

Lastly, and my point to all this is, PERS continues to be mismanaged and continues to struggle to pay retirees in Tier 1 due to previously poor decision making. They have attempted to placate and appease EPSD and 911 telecommunicators by offering us, **"A model for enhanced benefits exists in PERS for "high risk, high stress" jobs. ORS 238.280(2) has a special retirement eligibility rule for telecommunicators, otherwise known as 911 operators. Members with 25 years of service in those positions can retire earlier than General Service members. Their benefit is actuarially reduced and the member does not receive a cost of living adjustment until reaching age 55.** Providing a reduced

benefit is demeaning and frankly a slap in the face for those of us who have done this work for our entire career life. We are in essence being punished for wanting to retire with sound mental and physical wellbeing.

Although I realize that this decision has already been made, and the amendments have been completed, I believe it is important that all information be shared with and reviewed by the committee before making a final decision.

Yes, classifying EPSD and 911 telecommunicators as First Responders is an important and crucial step toward recognizing this profession for the services these professionals provide to their respective communities. But, not providing us as First Responders the benefits of being defined under "Police officer" for the purposes of retiring at a reasonable age, without reducing our benefits, is frankly like giving 950+ individuals a participation ribbon for being one of the most important members on the team.