



# OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters  
AFL-CIO CLC

April 4, 2023

Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, Members of the Committee:

We are proud to represent the 3700 professional firefighters within the State of Oregon. Everyday those 3700 members go to work to put their lives at risk caring for the citizens of Oregon. This has been abundantly clear during situations such as the COVID pandemic and wildfires such as the September 2020 conflagrations which affected so much of our state.

Although we represent 3700 members, the number of firefighters that should be in a State the size of Oregon is closer to 5000 per National Fire Protection Association recommendations. We already have an underserved state. Of the 3700 firefighters that are currently working, 1100 of those members could retire at this time. This puts Oregon and its local jurisdictions in extreme jeopardy of losing the most tenured fire fighters to retirement.

House Bill 2296 is a simple bill that allows those members that are eligible to retire to be able to do so and keep employment with their current employer. The impacts to the employer retaining these seasoned employees include giving a predictable retirement date and creating a predictable time to hire and train a new employee. The workback decreases the unfunded actuarial liability (UAL) by applying the savings of not paying the fire fighters PERS or employer portion instead applying it to the employers UAL.

House Bill 2296 creates a relationship between an employee and employer that is mutually beneficial to both parties. The workback or WAR is a voluntary program directed by the employer. This relates to the employee, as they can still retire as they want and not be forced to be a part of House Bill 2296 if they do not want to be.

One example is that of a Fire District employer, Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, that has saved over \$2,000,000 in taxpayer funds since this program began in 2019 in addition to the UAL savings.

This workback program has been in effect since 2019 within the fire service and is very successful. HB 2296 gives employers the needed short term retirement predictability and decrease in the employers UAL. The fire fighter receives all contractual benefits except the PERS IAP and increases to their pension.

HB 2296 passed unanimously out of committee with an amendment that moved the sunset date of this program from 2024 until 2034. It also passed unanimously in the house last week.

We appreciate the work that your committee will take on this important piece of legislation. We respectfully request that this come out of committee with a unanimous do pass recommendation to the Senate floor and we are available to answer any questions that you might have.

Karl Koenig  
President

Alan Ferschweiler  
Legislative Director