

PSERS Membership: Nursing, Custody, and Safety

Issue

Some policy makers may believe older employees in certain occupations are exposed to an inappropriate amount of workplace risk. These policy makers may seek to expand the Public Safety Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) membership as a means of addressing this risk.

Background

In 2012, the Legislature reduced early retirement benefits for newly hired teachers, school employees, and general public employees. The Legislature also required the SCPP to study high-risk job classifications for possible inclusion in PSERS. The [2012 SCPP study](#) found a handful of occupations had higher rates of serious workplace injury. The SCPP made no formal policy recommendations as a result of the study.

In subsequent years, both the Legislature and the SCPP considered proposals to expand PSERS membership to additional employees at state and local corrections departments, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and the Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA). Non-SCPP bills expanding PSERS membership passed the House during the [2013](#) and [2015 - 2016](#) Sessions, but ultimately were not enacted. The SCPP studied PSERS proposals/bills during the [2013](#), [2014](#), and [2015](#) Interims without recommendation.

The most recent PSERS membership proposal considered by the Legislature and SCPP is contained in [SHB 1718](#) (2015).

Highlights of Analysis

- ❖ There are options for addressing workplace risk both inside and outside of pension policy, and policy makers may differ on their preferred approach.
- ❖ Expanding PSERS may mitigate the impacts of some job risks for older employees. However, not all job risk can be eliminated.
- ❖ Expanding PSERS allows benefits to be enhanced without increasing costs to non-public safety employees or employers.
- ❖ Expanding PSERS to address risk has implications for affordability, contractual rights, and retention.

Option/SHB 1718 (2015)

- ❖ Expands PSERS membership to include employees:
 - ◇ Who provide nursing care to offender and patient populations at Department of Corrections, local corrections departments, and the DVA.
 - ◇ Whose primary responsibility is to provide nursing care to, or ensure the custody and safety of, offender, probationary, and patient populations and who are in a position that requires the completion of defensive tactics or de-escalation training, at one of the following DSHS institutions or centers:
 - ◆ Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration.
 - ◆ Mental health hospitals.
 - ◆ Child Study and Treatment Center.
 - ◆ Special Commitment Center.
 - ◆ Institutions or residential sites that serve developmentally disabled patients or offenders.
 - ◇ Who supervise eligible members meeting the above criteria.
- ❖ Adds DSHS and DVA to the statutory list of PSERS employers.
- ❖ Provides a transfer option for Public Employees' Retirement System Plans 2/3 members who would be newly eligible for PSERS membership under the bill. This includes a second-chance transfer option for some members.

Committee Activity

The committee studied this issue at the November and December meeting. A motion to recommend expanding PSERS membership as provided under SHB 1718 failed.

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