

Halverson, Beth

From: Scott A Cave <sccomm@sosmail.us>
Sent: Friday, November 15, 2019 4:14 PM
To: Fitzgibbon, Rep. Joe; Alsharbini, Noal
Cc: Office State Actuary, WA
Subject: WSJA letter to SPCC Chair Fitzgibbon
Attachments: WSJA letter to SPCC, November 15 2019 FINAL.pdf

Good afternoon Representative Fitzgibbon

On behalf of the Washington State Jail Association, please find the attached letter from President Lisa Shanahan to you as Chair of the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP). I would relay that members of the WSJA and local correction officers are planning to attend the upcoming SPCC November and meeting to listen to the scheduled presentation on the comparison of disability benefits for PSERS and LEOFF and provide comment.

If you have any problems opening this document or questions about its content, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Scott Cave
Contract lobbyist for WSJA
360 789-2772



November 15, 2019

Representative Joe Fitzgibbon, Chair
Select Committee on Pension Policy
P.O. Box 40914
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chair Fitzgibbon:

I'm writing to express the appreciation of the Washington State Jail Association (WSJA) for your leadership in advocating and securing the Select Committee on Pension Policy's consideration of two issues important to our membership of correctional managers, officers and support staff:

- 1) presentation on *Allowing Dual Members to transfer their PERS II years to PSERS* by the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS) at the December 17th SCPP meeting, and
- 2) a *Comparison of Disability benefits (PSERS/LEOFF II)* by State Actuary staff at the November 19th SCPP meeting

As I and others testified to the SPCC in September, correctional facilities across the state are impacted by the current PERS II/PSERS dual retirement system. Employment retirement decisions can affect staffing, morale and operations. Addressing inequities in the current dual system would improve an already difficult recruiting environment and help retain experienced staff, benefiting operations and improving public safety across the state.

I want to relay that at the end of the September SPCC meeting we spoke with Director Guerin and staff to suggest a follow-up meeting, which occurred on October 1st. While multiple retirement topics were discussed, these four seemed to merit further consideration:

1. Comparison of LEOFF and PSERS Disability Benefits

Compared with LEOFF II, PSERS receive a much reduced disability benefit package. Given the comparative training requirements, job stress and related safety and health issues, and the extraordinarily high suicide rate of correction officers, PSERS benefits should mirror those in LEOFF II.

2. Reduce PERS II dual member retirement age from 62 to 60

Reduce the retirement age for PERS II members with a combined 30 years (with some in PSERS) to age 60, same as PSERS. Currently, employees with multiple retirement systems retire from each system separately per their system requirement – age 62 for PERS II, and 60 for PSERS. Retiring on one system at 60 is financially unpalatable for most dual members, so they often work until age 62, which can present safety and personal health issues.

3. State allow a second transfer window for PERS II members to join PSERS

DRS relayed that the state was surprised at how few people chose to opt into PSERS in 2006. In part, employees relatively new to the system didn't assume a career in corrections, and since the buy in cost was substantial and grew to twice as the state estimated when the program was first offered, there was an incentive to remain in PERS II. Today many of those people are still employed in corrections and bring valuable experience and seniority that makes our facilities safer. These are people we want to retain; providing a second transfer window would help us and benefit PSERS.

4. Corrections Officer retirement system mortality rate and life span assumptions questioned

According to the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center, Corrections Officers have the:

- Highest suicide rate (39% higher than all professions; and twice as high as police officers),
- Shortest life-span (58 years), and
- Highest mortality rate

According to Blue H.E.L.P., between January 1, 2016 and June 30, 2019 578 law enforcement officers died by suicide; 107 of these were Corrections Officers (As noted, the suicide rate for COs is *twice* as high as police officers).

As you know, corrections deputies and officers reach full retirement at age 60 or 62 in PERS II/PSERS dual system, compared to age 53 for LEOFF members, despite that COs are required to receive similar training and accreditations, and face similar safety and personal risks as their law enforcement and first responder counterparts. Given the high suicide and mortality rates, it's no surprise COs also have the shortest life span. With these challenging work related impacts on the personal health of COs, we respectfully ask the SPCC to review and if warranted, recalibrate the assumptions for CO mortality and life span used for PERS II and PSERS.

I want to express my sincere appreciation for your leadership to address the retirement and workplace challenges facing corrections officers across the state. If you have questions, please contact me or WSJA's lobbyist Scott Cave at sccomm@sosmail.us.

Respectfully,



Lisa Shanahan, President