

TOM ANDERSEN
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 19: SOUTH SALEM



June 15, 2023

Timothy G Sekerak
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building
Salem, OR 97301

OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

RE: Vote Explanation – HB 2054-A

Chief Clerk Sekerak,

I am opposed to district attorneys and deputy district attorneys qualifying as police officers and firefighters under the Public Employees Retirement System. Thus, I voted in opposition to HB 2054-A which lowers the 30-year service eligibility requirement to 25 years as is the case with police officers and firefighters.

Police officers put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe. Firefighters do the same and that their work is becoming even more challenging with the realities of the climate crisis we face. The current retirement system for police officers and firefighters is right and appropriate. As an attorney, I work with law enforcement, district attorneys, and other people in the criminal justice system. While they play an important role in the safety of our communities, district attorneys do not have the same stressors or hardships in their work as experienced by police officers or firefighters. District attorneys and deputy district attorneys are not out in the community, putting themselves in harm's way, and they don't have the same potential of injury or death. I do not believe they should be put in the same category. I am in favor of keeping the requirements of their service to 30 years in line with other public employees.

District attorneys make significantly more money than their public defender counterparts who are not public employees. Our public defense system in Oregon is broken. Recruitment and retention of attorneys doing both defense and prosecution is important and necessary. However, this legislation exacerbates the already unequal treatment of district attorneys and public defenders.

As a Salem city councilor for eight years, I was involved in city budget discussions. I know how cities and counties are greatly impacted by funding PERS retirement costs which are entirely appropriate benefits for city employees. However, any changes to the PERS system should be taken very seriously given their impact on local governments' cost burden. In this instance, lowering PERS eligibility requirement to 25 years will be an expensive additional burden on Oregon cities and counties.

I am a member of the Public Employees Retirement System and know that those working in our state are vital to its function and deserving of retirement benefits. I value all those contributing to Oregon including district attorneys and deputy district attorneys. However, the difference in PERS retirement eligibility exists because of the varying types of service to our great state. I will continue carefully assessing the benefits to those serving Oregon so that all those receiving benefits do so fairly.

Best,

Representative Tom Andersen

