

Commission hears public comment on pension bill

The Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement (LCPR) on Tues., March 6, reviewed miscellaneous pension-related bills and again took up the 2018 Omnibus Retirement Bill. Numerous stakeholders spoke during the public testimony portion of the meeting.

Teachers Retirement Association (TRA) retirees from the group Retired Educators of Minnesota (REAM) said that REAM supports the pension bill as long as funding of the employer contribution portion is approved. REAM's Lonnie Duberstein said that he is grateful for his defined-benefit pension and wants the same benefit to be preserved for the next generation of teachers.

Education Minnesota's Rodney Rowe spoke to the recruitment and retention value of the TRA pension and said that his union supports the bill. Joan Beaver of REAM and Education Minnesota Retired and Louise Sundin of the Minneapolis Committee of 13 also spoke in support of the bill.

Representatives of school boards and administrators showed up in force to support the bill provided state pension adjustment aid is included. Scott Croonquist of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts thanked the commission for working out the pension adjustment formula, noting that because schools do not have general levy authority, such an aid provision is needed to offset increases in the TRA employer contribution.

Grace Keliher of the Minnesota School Boards Association, Valerie Dosland of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, Fred Nolan of the Minnesota Rural Education Association, and Joel Albright of Schools for Equity in Education also testified in favor of the pension bill.

Public safety and firefighter representatives testified that a strong pension system is needed to recruit and retain police officers. Joe Dellwo of the Minnesota State Patrol Trooper's Association noted that state troopers don't get Social Security and said that the bill represents shared sacrifice by all parties.

Members of the Minnesota State Retirement System (MSRS) representing the state Pollution Control Agency and the University of Minnesota agreed that a healthy pension system helps attract and retain skilled public workers at a time when "brain drain" and succession planning are major concerns.

Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) members from AFSCME testified that the 1 percent COLA outlined in the bill is hard to swallow, but the union supports the bill. It was noted that many PERA retirees have no Social Security coverage and are therefore deeply dependent on their state pensions.

Also on Tuesday, the commission reviewed separate bills dealing with state aid eligibility reporting for the Clearbrook Fire Department Relief Association, TRA coverage election authority for a Minnesota State employee, coverage for PERA part-time paramedics and emergency medical technicians employed by Hennepin Healthcare System, and clarifying PERA DC distributions for those still employed.

The pension commission intends to pass the bill at its next meeting, March 13 at 5:30 p.m. in Room 1200, Senate Office Building.