



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local Elected Officials and Coalition Band Together to Oppose Benefit Bills

LANSING – December 4, 2017 – Local elected officials from across the state join the coalition of first responders, representing more than 30,000 law enforcement and fire fighters in Michigan, in bi-partisan opposition of Senate Bills 686-701 and House Bills 5298 and 5299 as introduced last week.

The following local officials have spoken out in opposition to the legislation: L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County Executive; Mark Hackel, Macomb County Executive; Michael Bouchard, Oakland County Sheriff and Paula Zelenko, Mayor of Burton.

L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County Executive: “Oakland County has been an innovator in pension and retiree healthcare reform since the 1980s. With that in mind, we have begun to review the 20-bill package Lansing is offering on their version of retiree benefit ‘reform.’ So far, we cannot support what we have seen. The current bills pose a risk to our communities by undercutting promises that have been made to our employees, and especially, our first responders. We will continue to review the bills and push for more common sense solutions.”

Mark Hackel, Macomb County Executive: “The residents of our communities rely on and deserve quality law enforcement officials and fire fighters to protect our communities and respond in an emergency. The legislation introduced by the House and Senate will make it even harder than it is today for communities to compete with private sector benefits and attract and retain quality first responders. Local communities need to protect first responder benefits and negotiate and manage them at the local level.”

Michael Bouchard, Oakland County Sheriff: “I completely understand the need for fiscal discipline and integrity. However, there are two important points to make. First, the state’s fiscal house is not in order. All of the state of Michigan retirement and OPEB funds are not fully funded and for them to focus on the locals before they correct their own shortcomings is hypocritical at best. Secondly, do not restrain or ban practices from those communities that are fiscally sound. As written, this initiative is not a fiscal effort, but a control grab and philosophical club. Finally, going beyond fiscal guidelines and restraints by having the state make changes to the local control of healthcare and benefits undermines the integrity of this profession and is offensive to those who put their lives on the line every day to protect their

communities, exceeding what the Task Force recommended is unnecessary and will recklessly do damage to the hiring practices and recruitment of local law enforcement.”

Paula Zelenko, Mayor of Burton: “There is no one-size-fits-all approach to local government retirement reform. Each local municipality is different, and decisions about retiree health care and pension funding should be made at the local level, not by a state appointed committee. The recommendations put forth by the Governor’s Task Force create an unbiased checks and balances system for the state, local government and labor organizations.”

The reform bills were expected to follow the recommendations of the [Responsible Retirement Reform for Local Government Task Force](#) However, when introduced, they went far beyond the recommendations of the Task Force.

The legislation does not have unanimous Republican support.

“The Task Force issued a report which would protect benefits, in addition to ensuring financial health for local units of government,” said Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker, R-Lawton. “I support the reforms in the report and believe that coupled with the current emergency manager law, we can prevent local governments from reaching bankruptcy while also protecting the promises made to our law enforcement officers and fire fighters. I cannot support Senate Bills 686-701, as introduced, since they fail to protect these promises.”

“As a former sheriff, I have experienced the dangers of working in law enforcement, and understand the risks police officers and fire fighters take daily to protect our communities,” said Sen. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge. “Senate Bills 686-701 puts the health care and pension benefits we promise our first responders in jeopardy by threatening local control and making provisions to the emergency manager law.”

The House Michigan Competitiveness Committee will hold hearings on HB 5298 and HB 5299 and the Senate Michigan Competitiveness Committee will hold hearings on SB 686-701. Both hearings are scheduled for tomorrow, Tuesday, at 8:15 a.m.

“We understand the need for reform to protect the financial stability of our communities and post-employment benefits, and we were committed to working with lawmakers and leadership to come to a compromise,” said Ken Grabowski, Legislative Director for POAM. “Introducing legislation that places cities under state control and allows the state to change health care and pension benefits when a city is not in financial distress is a direct threat to the benefits of first responders and it’s breaking the promise that was made to the men and women who put their lives on the line daily.”

The labor/management coalition includes Deputy Sheriff’s Association of Michigan, Fraternal Order of Police, Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs, Michigan Association of Police Organizations, Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, Michigan Professional Fire Fighters Union, Michigan Sheriffs Association, Police Officers Association of Michigan, Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan.

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