

International Association of Fire Fighters



King County Paramedics
Local 2595

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Office of
The State Actuary

Select Committee on Pension Policy
PO Box 40914
Olympia, WA.
98504-0914

12 April 2004

Dear Committee Members,

For over a decade the Paramedics employed by King County Medic One have struggled to correct a pension situation that has plagued our Paramedic program since its inception in 1976. As one of only six Paramedic programs in King County, we remain the only one who has not been given access into the LEOFF system. Further, we are the only publicly-employed Paramedics left in this state who have not been granted access into the LEOFF system. Our program provides Paramedic service to all of south King County and currently employs seventy full-time Paramedics. Ten of these Paramedics are in PERS 1, and the remainder are in PERS 2. Several members have LEOFF service credit from prior employment with Fire or Police departments.

As a mature EMS system we are now seeing the original Paramedics who started the Medic One Program in south King County struggle to remain on the job beyond the age of 60. The physical and emotional challenges of providing pre-hospital medicine makes it nearly impossible for an individual to work until age 65 without retiring early with an unacceptable actuary reduction in benefits. All other publicly employed Paramedics are eligible to retire without an actuarial reduction at age 53. Our paramedics are also not eligible for presumptive infectious disease coverage because we are not in the LEOFF system. As advanced life support providers we are the most at risk.

Two sessions ago HB1202 provided LEOFF portability for publicly employed Paramedics whose jobs are transferred to a fire department. We were hopeful that we would be able to take advantage of this legislation, however, a study looking at a transfer of our Paramedic program into the fire service appears to be concluding. Based upon discussions to date, it would appear that a transition to the fire service would be unlikely.

Representatives of our group met with several committee members including Jack Pringle to talk about potential legislation that would remedy this situation. Based upon those discussions, it is our hope that this committee will support a narrow focus bill, specific to our group, that would allow for the LEOFF portability options in HB1202 to be utilized by our members without a transition to the fire service. Additionally, we would like to see further investigation as to why costs for buyback of service credit more than doubled from the projected costs as outlined in the fiscal note attached to the bill. Our understanding is that a statutory interest rate was applied to buyback calculations, which is inflated when compared to today's current interest rates. We have had significant dialog with our employer and we are confident that King County will support our efforts to achieve this goal. It is in all parties interests to find an acceptable solution to this situation as soon as possible. The longer it takes, the more it will cost everyone involved.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

I may be reached by e-mail at Chris_Merritt@kcfiremed.org or by pager at 425.323.0502 if you have any questions or suggestions as to how to proceed.

Respectfully,

Chris Merritt, President
King County Paramedics
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