



COMPREHENSIVE REPORT FOLLOW-UP

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ISSUE STATEMENT

The LEOFF Plan 2 Board's (Board) 2014 proposal to tighten the career change law revealed tension between the policies of: 1) Maintaining public confidence that LEOFF Plan 2 is well designed and professionally managed; and 2) Facilitating smaller jurisdictions' access to highly trained and experienced LEOFF Plan 2 retirees.

OVERVIEW

During the 2013 interim the Board learned some LEOFF Plan 2 retirees were using the 2005 career change law to work as law enforcement officers or fire fighters while drawing their pensions. Some employers facilitated this expansion of the law's original intent by redefining historically LEOFF positions to avoid LEOFF eligibility. Some felt this was inappropriate.

The Board proposed curtailing the ability of a LEOFF Plan 2 retiree to draw a pension and work in a historically LEOFF position. The Board's proposal was introduced in 2014 as HB 2479. The Legislative debate revealed tension between the Board's original policy goal and the goal of allowing smaller jurisdictions to compete for law enforcement officers and fire fighters they would not otherwise be able to afford.

The Board revisited this issue during 2014 but voted to table it until the 2015 interim.

MEMBERS IMPACTED

Two hundred sixty-five LEOFF Plan 2 retirees have utilized the provisions of the career change law since its inception in 2005¹. A similar number of members would be impacted by any changes to the law if those utilization numbers remain constant. Additionally, there are public trust issues addressed by the original bill that impact all LEOFF Plan 2 members.

¹ Data from November 2013 on career change usage report produced by the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS).

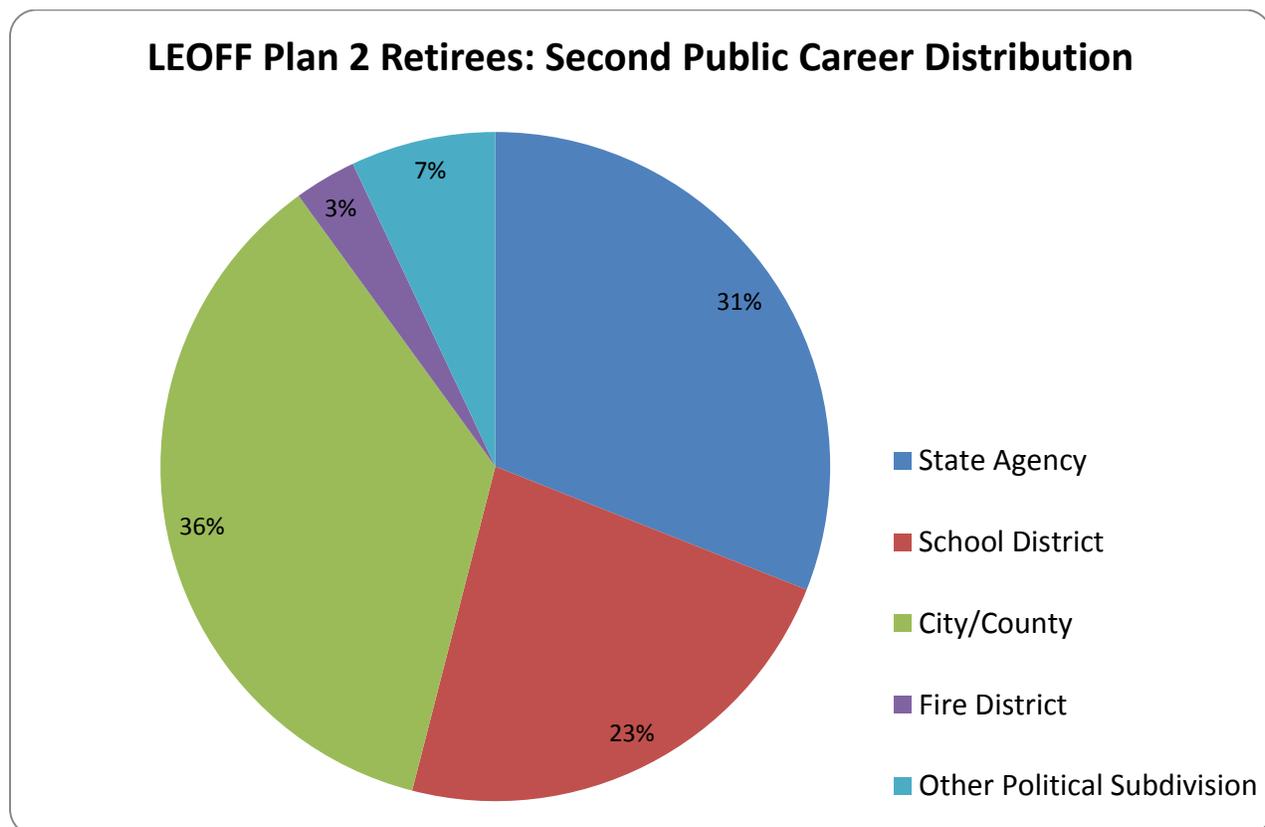
BACKGROUND & POLICY ISSUES

Career Change

Before 2005 a LEOFF Plan 2 retiree's pension stopped if they worked in a job covered by any state-wide public retirement system. The Board recognized member's may no longer be able to fulfill the physical demands of law enforcement or firefighting before they were ready, or could afford to stop working. The Legislature passed the Board's proposed Career Change legislation in 2005 enabling retired LEOFF Plan 2 retirees to start a second career in non-LEOFF public employment. A retiree accepting such a job can either establish membership in another public system, thus suspending their LEOFF Plan 2 pension, or waive membership in the new system and continue receiving their pension.

The Board intended to facilitate transition from a physically demanding profession to a second less strenuous career. The Board did not contemplate enabling retirees to continue working as a law enforcement officer or fire fighter while receiving their pension.

The vast majority of participating retirees use Career Change as intended: to facilitate public employment as something other than a law enforcement officer or fire fighter. Recent DRS data shows 265 LEOFF Plan 2 retirees working in public employment with an average annual salary of \$28,268. Sixty-one percent work for non-LEOFF employers. Most of those retirees working for LEOFF employers do not work in historically LEOFF positions:



As discussed during the 2013 Career Change briefings, some employers seeking the benefit of the years of training and experience possessed by LEOFF Plan 2 retirees have redefined LEOFF positions as PERS positions. For instance, some employers have redefined full-time police chief and fire chief positions as “part-time.” This allows LEOFF Plan 2 retirees to hold those positions without losing receipt of their pensions.

An example of this appeared in 2015 involving the Tenino Chief of Police. He retired under LEOFF Plan 2 and subsequently went to work as the Tenino Police Chief. His contract required him to work 159 hours per month, one hour below the threshold of 160 hours which would have made him full-time, requiring reentry into LEOFF Plan 2 and suspension of his pension. DRS found that the chief was working additional hours such that he qualified as a full time employee. It stopped his pension and billed the City for \$82,462 in pension overpayments.

Proposal to Curtail Abuse

The Board proposed curtailing the ability of a LEOFF Plan 2 retiree to draw a pension and work in a historically LEOFF position. The proposal was introduced in 2014 as HB 2479. After passing the House, the bill failed to pass the Senate, in part because of concerns raised by stakeholder groups about the desirability of providing smaller jurisdictions access to highly trained and experienced fire chiefs and police chiefs they could not otherwise afford.

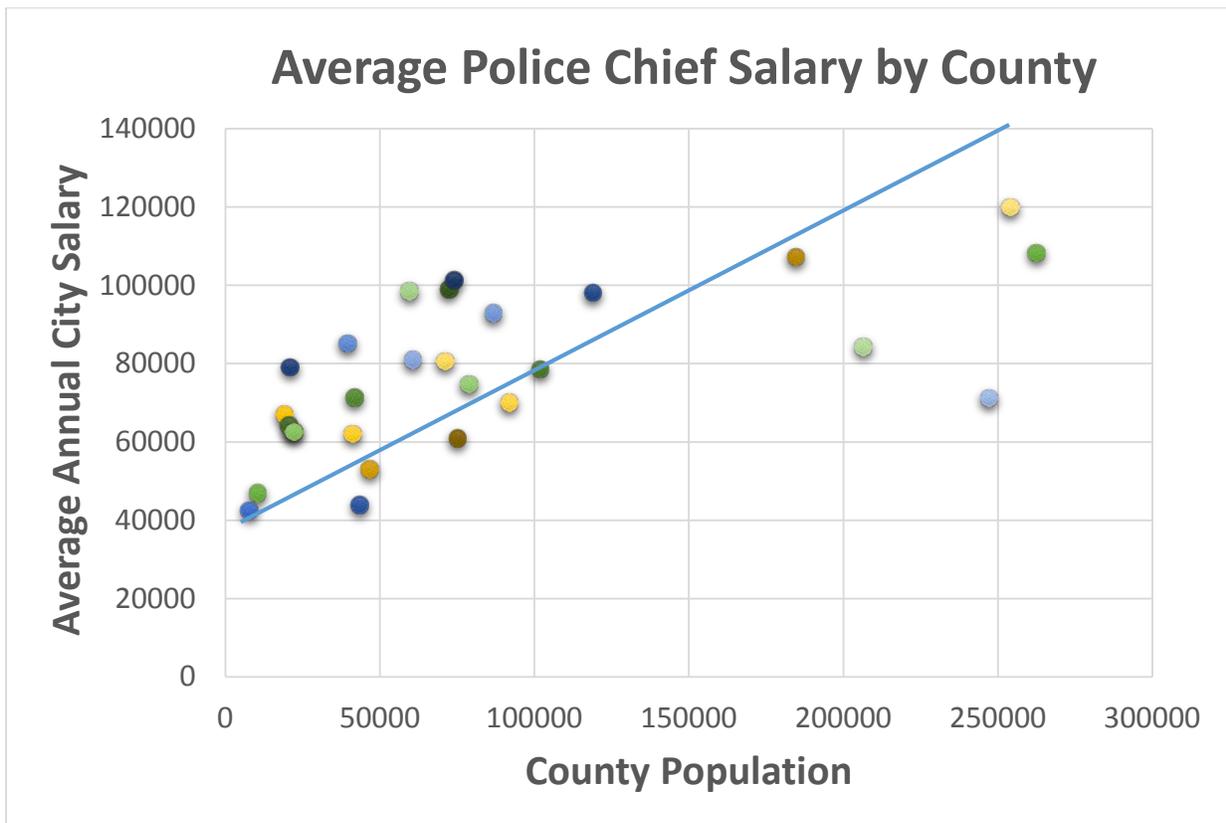
THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

Perhaps more than other public professions, law enforcement and firefighting require continuous, specific training. Over the course of a 25 year career a fire fighter’s employer spends approximately \$142,500 on training². Law enforcement employers also incur significant training costs. In addition to specific training, the years of field experience possessed by LEOFF Plan 2 retirees has great potential value to employers.

LEOFF employers are, by definition, mostly political subdivisions. Local government budgets, and hence public safety salaries, vary widely across Washington depending in large part on the tax base. The 2014 career change analysis looked at chief salaries by employer population. While salary ranged significantly between many small jurisdictions and large jurisdictions, a better predictor of salary range was a city’s location, i.e. urban vs. rural.

In an effort to examine the urban vs rural distinction, the data is sorted below by population of the county the city is in, rather than the city itself.

² The South King County Fire Training Coalition, which provides training to fire fighters from 8 different jurisdictions, charges employers \$5700 per year per fire fighter. $\$5700 \times 25 \text{ years} = \$142,500$.



While there is not a one-to-one correlation, the overall trend is that cities in counties with higher populations tend to pay higher salaries. This lends some support to the idea that allowing LEOFF Plan 2 retirees some ability to work while receiving their pensions could help lower paying jurisdictions compete for highly trained and experienced law enforcement officers and fire fighters.

IMPORTANCE OF A WELL DESIGNED AND PROFESSIONALLY MANAGED PLAN

Public perception of pension abuse can be exacerbated when benefits appear to flow disproportionately to highly placed employees. Public displeasure over perceived abuses undermines public confidence in the retirement system as a whole.

Uninterrupted Employment

If an employee appears to retire, then comes back to work in the same or similar position with their former employer, it raises questions whether the person ever actually retired. Both state retirement law and the Internal Revenue Code require a full separation from service before qualifying for a retirement allowance. These requirements exist to guard against pseudo-retirements, where a person goes through the process of retiring in order to qualify for their pension, but has only briefly, or in some cases never, left their employer.

Public Pension + Public Salary

Receiving both a public pension and a public salary at the same time is a common hot-button with the general public.

Newspaper articles have featured the total compensation received by LEOFF Plan 2 retirees who return to law enforcement officer or fire fighter employment. A recent Seattle Times report on LEOFF Plan 2 retirees working as police chiefs and fire chiefs described a LEOFF Plan 2 retiree working a fire chief collecting a \$100,000 a year pension and a \$90,000 a year salary. See Appendix A.

One could argue adding together pensions for previous service and the salaries earned for current service is mixing apples and oranges. LEOFF Plan 2 pensions, unlike salaries for current service, are not paid out of current revenues. Those pensions are fully funded at retirement by employer and employee contributions paid over the course of the employee's career, plus earnings on those contributions³.

When a public employee retires and goes to work in the private sector or for a public entity in another state, no objections are heard. Some question why the result is different if that same public retiree goes to work in the public sector. Judging from the comments posted in response to recent newspaper articles, many members of the public do not find this analysis persuasive.

Perceived Favoritism

Some of the public anger over allegations of abuse flow from a perceived misuse of authority. Articles often feature persons working in upper management negotiating with the mayor and/or city council to create a position description allowing them to earn a salary as a law enforcement officer or fire fighter while drawing a LEOFF pension.

The vast majority of LEOFF Plan 2 retirees utilizing the career change law do not work as law enforcement officers or fire fighters and make less than in their first careers. For example, a retired police officer providing part-time security at a middle school. These are not the cases reported in the paper.

BALANCING OPTIONS

During Board discussions in 2014, many Board members saw the value of allowing LEOFF Plan 2 retirees to share the value of their experience with smaller employers, but were uncomfortable with the current situation where position descriptions for LEOFF positions were modified to facilitate employment of LEOFF retirees.

The Board directed staff to develop options which maintain LEOFF Plan 2 as a well-designed and professionally managed plan while providing a "bright line" defining when a LEOFF Plan 2 retiree could work in a historically LEOFF position without suspension of their entire pension.

Make Benefit Generally Available

An issue with the current situation is the appearance of a "work around" where an employer takes specific action to accommodate a specific employee. This perceived dynamic appears where the employee continues with the same employer. It also appears when the benefit appears limited to persons with a motivated prospective employer.

³ According to the Washington State Investment Board, 86% of every dollar paid out in LEOFF Plan 2 pension benefits comes from investment earnings.

These issues could be addressed by:

- Requiring the LEOFF Plan 2 retiree work for a different employer than they retired from;
- Openly provide the benefit so specific employer action would no longer be required.

This could be done by:

- Making the benefit available to a specific class of employees, i.e. chiefs; or
- Making the benefit generally available to all LEOFF Plan 2 retirees.

Not Encouraging Earlier Retirement

Making the benefit generally available could incentivize employees to retire earlier to utilize the new standard. This could negatively impact the original employer and create an actuarial cost. The Actuary bases future costs in part by projecting when people will retire, i.e. how long they will draw a benefit. If the new standard creates enough incentive to retire earlier, this could create an actuarial cost.

A minimum service credit requirement, possibly 20 or 25 years, could help address this issue and ensure that persons eligible for LEOFF reemployment were highly experienced employees.

Limiting Total of Pension plus Salary

The public shows concern when a retiree's total income, pension plus salary, appears excessive. Concern is especially likely if the combination doubles or nearly doubles the person's compensation. While the objection is debatable, it is clearly an area of public concern.

This issue could be addressed by limiting the combined amount of a LEOFF Plan 2 retiree's salary and pension. Possible alternatives include:

- Limiting total compensation to a percentage of Final Average Salary: Limiting total pension and salary to a set percentage of Final Average Salary (FAS) would ensure that the retiree's total compensation would be similar to what he or she earned prior to retirement. This could address perceptions of abuse. On the other hand, requiring DRS to develop and track a new, LEOFF Plan 2 specific, post-retirement employment standard could generate an administrative cost.
- Limit the Timeframe for Collecting Both Pension and Salary: The State's other Plan 2 systems allow retirees to work in a system-covered position for up to 867 hours per year (approximately 5 months). Once a retiree reaches that point, their pension stops for the remainder of the calendar year. It restarts at the beginning of the next year, stopping again if the retiree works another 867 hours. DRS has systems and reporting requirements in place to track the 867 hour rule for the State's other Plan 2 systems.

Adopting this same standard for LEOFF Plan 2 retirees working in historically LEOFF positions would effectively limit the combined salary and pension, thus mitigating the "double-dipping" issue. It would be consistent with current policy in the State's other plan 2 systems. Finally, it would be easier for DRS than administering a new standard.

NEXT STEPS – OPTIONS

The Board voted 6 to 4 at its September meeting to request reintroduction of HB 2479 for the 2016 Legislative session. The Board further reviewed and discussed the LEOFF 2 return to work issue at its October off-site retreat. In keeping with the Board's September direction an updated draft of the original bill updated for the 2016 session is attached as Appendix B.

Option 1: Direct staff to present a Final Proposal (reintroduction of HB 2479 for the 2016 Legislative session) with fiscal note for Board action at the December 16th Meeting.

Option 2: Take no further action.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Appendix A: *Fire, police officials get retire-rehire deals*, Seattle Times, November 21, 2013.

Appendix B: Updated Code Reviser Draft with same language as HB 2479 updated for introduction in 2016 Legislative session.

APPENDIX A

Seattle Times Article: *Fire, police officials get retire-rehire deals*

Published in Seattle Times:

Updated: 8:25 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 21, 2013 | Posted: 8:25 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 21, 2013

Fire, police officials get retire-rehire deals

By MIKE BAKER

The Associated Press

SEATTLE —

A couple years after retiring as Lakewood fire chief at age 58, Paul Webb returned to the profession and his former job title — this time at Orting Valley Fire and Rescue.

Hired under a contract without some of the typical employee benefits, Webb's arrangement at the end of 2009 allowed him to draw more than \$100,000 in annual pension payments while also earning up to \$90,000 in yearly pay. It was an interim position, according to his contracts. He stayed in the job for three years.

It wasn't long before six of Webb's past colleagues followed similar paths, retiring and taking jobs in various contract positions, according to records.

In recent years, Washington lawmakers changed laws to crack down on retire-rehire arrangements, seeking to prevent pensioners from double-dipping when they return to similar government jobs.

But The Associated Press found that gaps in the special rules created for law enforcement officers and firefighters have allowed them to draw salaries alongside their pension. And those retirees generally retire much younger and with much larger retirement plans than teachers or other government workers.

According to local and state records obtained by AP under public records law, dozens of public safety retirees around the state became contractors. Some took part-time jobs such as polygraph consultants or pilots or instructors, while others returned to prominent managerial positions.

Other retirees in those two retirement systems reserved for law enforcement officers and firefighters — called LEOFF-1 and LEOFF-2 — took jobs that had them work slightly less than full time or with slightly less benefits, also allowing them to bypass rules that would have halted pension payments.

Local governments gain from the arrangements because officials can hire someone with experience at either a discounted pay rate or without having to cover some typical benefits.

DuPont Mayor Michael Grayum recently worked closely with the Department of Retirement Systems to ensure the city was following the rules in the hiring a of a police chief who had retired from a different department. The city didn't seek out pensioners, but three of the top candidates for the job were retirees.

"We were able to hire more experienced leadership for a lower cost than we have historically," he said. The new chief is able to keep his pension because his job is only 35 hours a week instead of 40.

The Legislature established retire-rehire rules for many government workers in 2003 due to concerns about the frequency and cost of those arrangements. In 2011, lawmakers placed even tighter controls on those deals, closing what some political leaders derided as "loopholes."

Rules for members of the newer LEOFF system were established in 2005 with the intent of preventing retire-rehire arrangements in similar jobs but designed to allow transition to less-demanding occupations in government.

Steve Nelsen, executive director of the LEOFF-2 Retirement Board, said the rules weren't meant to allow retirees to return to work in similar LEOFF jobs. "This was not the intent of the bill," Nelsen said. He said several Board members have expressed concern about the DuPont case that surfaced in the wake of a previous AP story and that the Board is now exploring the issue.

LEOFF rehire rules revolve around the issue of eligibility. Workers are eligible for the LEOFF system if they are fully compensated in full-time positions as a law enforcement officer, firefighter or supervisor. A retiree who gets rehired into a similar LEOFF-eligible position would have their pensions benefits halted.

But if a LEOFF retiree returns to a position that's less than full-time or not fully compensated, they technically would not qualify for the system and can avoid disruption of their benefits, according to the state.

Some have seized on that potential.

— In Maple Valley, in King County, Larry Rude was hired in 2007 to a contract position as assistant fire chief. He started in the new position the same day he retired from the state system, according to records.

For three years, Rude earned more than \$100,000 a year in salary — plus other benefits — along with a similar amount in retirement payments. Rude said he was allowed to draw pension and salary because he was only working in a part-time position, saying it "wasn't very many" hours a week.

Rude said he didn't have a specific number of hours that he typically worked, although the final contract he signed said Rude could work up to 159 hours a month — an average of about 37 hours a week.

— In Soap Lake, in central Washington, officials chose Glenn Quantz as an interim police chief last year, bringing him on as a contractor. Quantz had retired in 2009 at age 53 from the Thurston County Sheriff's Office.

Mayor Raymond Gravelle told state officials in a letter obtained by AP that Quantz was working 32 hours a week — making it a part-time job that wouldn't disrupt his benefits. However, Quantz is earning the full salary of the police chief and the same amount as the previous chief, according to records provided by the city's finance director.

Quantz declined to comment about his situation. Gravelle said the city is small enough that Quantz doesn't need to work full-time, but he said officials will be going back to review records to ensure they are compliant.

— In the Orting Valley case, documents show Webb consulted with the state about his rehire transition because he didn't want it to disrupt his retirement benefits. While Webb was working in a full-time post, a state official told him that there would be no impact because he didn't qualify for sick leave cash-outs and some other benefits.

"It was definitely full-time, but it wasn't fully compensated," Webb said in an interview.

Dave Nelsen, the legal and legislative services manager at the Department of Retirement Systems, said it's not clear what the review entailed at the time but said the issue of what qualifies as "fully compensated" is subjective and could be interpreted differently by other officials.

— At North Highline Fire District in the Seattle area, Steve Marstrom was hired to a contract as the administrative chief. Marstrom had retired from the Lakewood Fire District more than a decade before at age 50.

Marstrom's contract said he did not have set hours but would be paid \$8,000 a month. He could also get \$1,500 a month for housing. Marstrom said his role at North Highline was strictly an administrative one, since he was supervising personnel and not participating in any firefighting activities.

Because he wasn't personally involved in firefighting, Marstrom said the role didn't qualify for the LEOFF system so it wouldn't disrupt his LEOFF benefits.

Other LEOFF retirees in the system managed to get hired in similar roles that are technically in other pension systems. Some fire officials transitioned to become fire inspector or deputy fire marshal. Police officials transitioned to work as a "violence prevention" leader or agency security manager.

Depending on the circumstances, state officials could decide that workers hired as contractors should have been reported to the state as actual employees, potentially leading to a halting of pension payments. By hiring as contractors, however, the employees are more difficult for state pension managers to track.

One worker in the larger group of Lakewood retirees who became contractors had a part-time salary of \$90 per hour, while another was hired back as the department's full-time "emergency preparedness coordinator." Nelsen, the retirement system manager, said the agency was further examining the cases of Rude, Marstrom and Webb.

Earlier this year, after an AP report that described the case of former Lakewood official Greg Hull as part of a larger story about how some workers boosted their pensions with pre-retirement raises, the state audited files related to Hull and determined that he had been improperly classified as a contractor in his newer job at DuPont.

Retirement system managers are now seeking to recover more than \$550,000 in excess pension payments from that city.

Retirees in the two systems dedicated for law enforcement officers and firefighters have different rules than most other retirees. Many retired teachers, for example, would be unable to work more than 867 hours a year in a government job without having their benefits disrupted, but law enforcement and firefighter retirees could conceivably work more than 1,800 hours a year.

Law enforcement and firefighters also get more leeway even though their pay and benefits are typically much greater than other government workers. The median worker who retired over the last 10 years into a LEOFF system currently gets about \$45,000 per year in pension payments. By comparison, the median retiree into the teacher pension systems has a benefit about half that size — \$24,000.

Despite the much larger pension values, the median LEOFF retiree departed the job at age 56 while the median teacher retiree worked until age 61.

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AP Writer Mike Baker can be reached on Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/HiPpEV>
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APPENDIX B

Updated Retire-Rehire Bill – Code Reviser Draft

BILL REQUEST - CODE REVISER'S OFFICE

BILL REQ. #: Z-0646.1/15

ATTY/TYPIST: LL:eab

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Placing restrictions on retired law enforcement officers and firefighters employed in certain public positions.

AN ACT Relating to retired law enforcement officers and firefighters employed in certain public positions; amending RCW 41.26.500; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature has recognized the physical demands of law enforcement officer and firefighter duties by providing for earlier retirement from the law enforcement officers' and firefighters' retirement system than from other state retirement systems. Chapter 372, Laws of 2005 facilitates transition of firefighters and law enforcement officers to other careers, recognizing those career professionals could still provide valuable public service in positions other than law enforcement and firefighting.

It is not the intent, nor is it a reasonable expectation of members, that chapter 372, Laws of 2005 allow plan 2 retirees of the law enforcement officers' and firefighters' retirement system to continue in a law enforcement officer or firefighter career and still collect their retirement allowance.

Sec. 2. RCW 41.26.500 and 2005 c 372 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except under subsection (3) of this section, a retiree under the provisions of plan 2 shall not be eligible to receive such retiree's monthly retirement allowance if he or she is employed in an eligible position as defined in RCW 41.40.010, 41.32.010, 41.37.010, or 41.35.010, or as a law enforcement officer or firefighter as defined in RCW 41.26.030. If a retiree's benefits have been suspended under this section, his or her benefits shall be reinstated when the retiree terminates the employment that caused

his or her benefits to be suspended. Upon reinstatement, the retiree's benefits shall be actuarially recomputed pursuant to the rules adopted by the department.

(2) The department shall adopt rules implementing this section.

(3) A member or retiree who becomes employed in an eligible position as defined in RCW 41.40.010, 41.32.010, 41.35.010, or 41.37.010 shall have the option to enter into membership in the corresponding retirement system for that position notwithstanding any provision of RCW 41.04.270.

(a) A retiree who elects to enter into plan membership shall have his or her benefits suspended as provided in subsection (1) of this section.

(b) A member or retiree who does not elect to enter into plan membership shall be eligible to initiate or continue to receive his or her benefits without interruption except as provided in (c) of this subsection.

(c) This subsection (3) does not apply to retirees or members in positions that would otherwise be eligible for the law enforcement officers' and firefighters' retirement system except that:

(i) The position is less than full-time;

(ii) The position is less than fully compensated;

(iii) The position is not fully commissioned;

(iv) The position includes additional duties that would make the position ineligible for the law enforcement officers' and firefighters' retirement system; or

(v) The retiree or member is designated as an independent contractor.

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Retiree Return to Work

Comprehensive Report Follow-up
November 18, 2015



Issue

Career Change legislation is sometimes used inappropriately

Board proposal to remedy revealed tension

- Public confidence in well designed and professionally managed public pension plan
- Access to highly trained and experienced LEOFF Plan 2 retirees for small jurisdictions



Issue History

2013 interim - Proposed Return to Work legislation (HB 2479)

- Passed House; No hearing in Senate; Did not pass

2014 interim – Studied/No action taken

2015 interim

- September and October 2015 meetings
- 6 to 4 vote to update HB 2479 for reintroduction in 2016



Proposed Changes HB 2479 (2014)

LEOFF Plan 2 retirees cannot draw a pension if working in a position that would qualify for LEOFF but for the fact that it is:

- Less than full time
- Less than fully compensated
- Not fully commissioned
- Includes additional non-LEOFF duties
- Worker is an independent contractor



Next Steps - Options

1. Direct staff to present a Final Proposal

- Reintroduction of House Bill 2479
- Draft legislation with fiscal note

2. Take no further action

Questions?

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