



THE HENNEPIN COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF PARAMEDICS AND EMTs
1325 WINTER ST, SUITE 102. MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55413

May 5, 2023

To: Senator John Marty, Chair – Senate Finance Committee
Senator Nick Frentz, Vice Chair – Senate Finance Committee

RE: Opposition to SF1959

Dear Senator Marty, Senator Frentz, and Committee Members:

The Hennepin County Association of Paramedics and EMTs (HCAPE) represents the paramedics and dispatchers of Hennepin EMS (HEMS). Our members participate in the PERA P&F pension plan and have for many decades.

I am writing to advise you that HCAPE does not fully support HF/1234/SF1959 as written. We have read and heard testimony that labor is supportive of this bill and that is simply not true. Our Union has not been involved or contacted regarding any changes to duty disabled benefits. We have submitted written testimony to committee members in the House opposing HF 1234 with no contact from any legislators.

We stand in solidarity with other labor unions in supporting and opposing the following provisions:

Provisions of the bill that HCAPE Supports:

- 24-32 Weeks of off the job treatment for Mental Health injuries.
- Reimbursement to Employer for Employees wages and benefits while seeking treatment.
- Employer mandated wellness training in order to receive reimbursement.
- Protections of private data obtained from Employees while they go through treatment.
- 99% vs 60% tax free pension payments to those that are permanent and totally disabled.
- MS 299A Continued Healthcare costs shifted from Employer to State of MN.

Provisions of the bill that HCAPE Opposes:

- PERA Offset #1 and #2 as written. These proposed pension penalties are punitive as they are written and could bankrupt some duty disabled PERA members or force them to quite their reemployment jobs because they would literally be working for free. There have been



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- options provided to the legislature that can and will work and would assist to make the police and fire fund healthy. These suggestions have been silenced and have not been allowed to be part of any legitimate discussions on improving this bill.
- Retroactive PERA penalties. Our current duty-disabled pension members retired under a certain set of rules and now those rules are being changed on them after the fact. Their household finances have been set up under these rules and now they are being drastically changed.
- The “Burden of Proof” is shifted to Employee vs PERA if pension eligibility is contested by PERA. The courts have already ruled that the burden of proof is on PERA and not the Employee.
- One-time funding source (\$104 million dollars). During our stakeholders meetings, we were advised that this would be continuous funding and somewhere along the lines it was changed to one-time funding. It is projected that this funding will only last for 2-3 years. In the event that state government is in a budget deficit in the next 2-3 years, it is highly unlikely that additional funding will be provided to pay for everything, and those costs will be shifted back to the Employer, but only this time they will be responsible to pay for continued healthcare benefits as well as treatment for 24-32 weeks. There is no funding in the tails for this bill, which has been brought forth as a problem in several committee hearings already.
- Prohibiting Employees to negotiate MS 299A continued healthcare benefit settlements when the Employer appeals those benefits, but not providing a provision that prohibits the Employers to file an appeal. This literally forces the Employee to litigate those benefits every time (\$20-30K), with those costs being borne by the Employee for the litigation out of their own pockets. The only option left by the Employee would be to walk away once the appeal is filed by the Employer. This can only be described as a punitive change to the Employee, which is specifically designed to make them walk away from their continued healthcare benefits (which they have a right to under MS 299A).

In addition, MS 299A should be amended to include paramedics who are currently not covered or entitled to continuation of health insurance coverage if they receive a duty disability.

We acknowledge that is a very complicated bill that has a dramatic impact on duty disabled first responders in Minnesota. We acknowledge that the bill contains many positive provisions, but the bill also contains many negative provisions that are punitive to those who have been injured in the line of duty. We believe there are too many major issues that have not been resolved or have been pushed to be handled at a later date. There is still time during this session to improve this bill and get it right. We owe it to the police officers, firefighters, and paramedics who have been injured in the line of duty to get it right. I ask that you take our testimony, and those of other labor unions, and act to correct the shortcomings of this bill which aim to punish current and future duty disabled first responders.



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Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Shane Hallow

President

Hennepin County Association of Paramedics and EMTs