



The Florida House of Representatives

Paul Renner
Speaker

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

March 24, 2024

Media Contact:

media@myfloridahouse.gov

(850) 717-5780

Florida House Proposes Boost to Public Employee Retirement Benefits

Florida House plan calls for restoring full retirement benefits to Special Risk employees, restoring cost-of-living adjustment, and increasing employer-funded match to investment plan

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (March 24, 2023) — Today, the House Appropriations Committee released Proposed Committee Substitute for House Bill 239, which provides a significant investment in Florida's public employees. The bill increases retirement benefits for the 629,073 members of the Florida Retirement System (FRS) and 151,913 of our current retirees.

The FRS is the fourth largest state retirement system in the country and ranks first in the world in efficiency with the lowest administrative cost per employee. It is the primary retirement plan for employees of state and county government agencies, district school boards, state colleges, and state universities. It also serves as the retirement plan for the employees of 180 cities and 153 special districts throughout Florida.

For our first responders including Law Enforcement, Firefighters, Correctional Officers, and Emergency Medical Technicians, the bill lowers the years of service and age needed to reach full retirement to the pre-2011 requirements. Age is reduced from 60 to 55 and years of service is reduced from 30 to 25.

In 2011, the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for FRS Pension members was eliminated for all years of service after July 1, 2011. All members retiring after 2011 saw their COLA reduced.

The bill restores the 3 percent COLA for all members of the FRS Pension Plan. Restoring the COLA will help our retired teachers, first responders, and state and local employees fight the rising inflation in our country.

For the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP), members that were restricted to a maximum of 5 years will be allowed to participate for 8 years. The bill also removes age restrictive windows to enter DROP. These restrictive windows prompted many public employees, including our law enforcement officers and first responders, to retire before they were ready. These changes will help our state and local agencies and departments retain experienced staff for a much longer period of time.

The bill also continues the State's commitment to the FRS Investment Plan. In 2022, the Legislature increased the employer contribution on behalf of members by 3 percent. The bill increases the contribution amount by an additional 1 percent. This will bring the total contribution by employers to 7.3 percent for regular class members and 15 percent for our law enforcement and first responders.

The State of Florida is currently facing a 16.1% employee vacancy rate. For our sworn personnel, the vacancy rate is 16.4%. It is time for Florida to invest in our public servants to once again attract and retain talented employees who are willing to serve and protect, teach our children, and keep this great state running efficiently for our citizens. This bill unequivocally shows that the House of Representatives is committed to making that investment.

"Florida runs the most efficient government in the nation, giving us the ability to invest in our people and in the critical needs of our state and local communities. Our prudent investments of state dollars produced budget surpluses that allow us to raise the pension contributions to our employees, first responders, and educators," said Speaker Paul Renner (R-Palm Coast). "We value our workers and want to promote common sense incentives to recruit and retain talent across our workforce to keep Florida prosperous."

House Appropriations Committee Chair Tom Leek (R-Ormond Beach), said, "Florida's retirement system is one of the most efficient and well-run in the nation. Our law enforcement and first responders get up every day to serve and protect. Making this investment will reward our talented workforce and help fill critical needs across the state from our police officers to our teachers."

Bill sponsor Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera (R-Coral Gables), said, "We owe a special debt of gratitude to our first responders – those in the Special Risk category. Restoring full retirement benefits after 25 years of service is the right thing to do to show that we support the men and women who keep our communities safe. It is a benefit they've earned and deserve."

"Lifelong service in law enforcement is a journey that brings incredible joy by having the opportunity to protect individuals and families, but it also carries a heavy burden of responsibility and a high level of risk," said Florida Sheriffs Association President and Hernando County Sheriff Al Nienhuis. "Speaker Renner and the Florida House have been incredible advocates for law enforcement, and this legislation to support the Florida Retirement System

truly shows their appreciation for law enforcement officers putting their life on the line each day."

"The Florida State Fraternal Order of Police and our over 24,000 members thank Speaker Paul Renner for his continued support and insight into protecting Florida's first responders," said Steve Zona, President Florida State Fraternal Order of Police. "The return to a 25-year retirement for law enforcement officers means 5 fewer years of risk of great bodily harm and 5 fewer years of exposure to unthinkable scenes that will live in their minds forever. Through Speaker Renner's leadership and advocacy for law enforcement, our officers will now have more time with their families along with a healthier retirement."

"With over 30,000 members, the Florida PBA is the largest law enforcement union in the State of Florida. The long-term success of public safety in our state begins with investing in our law enforcement, correctional, and correctional probation officers. This proposal promotes a rewarding career path that reflects the extraordinary personal sacrifices these men and women make on behalf of every community throughout our state every day," said John Kazanjian, President Florida Police Benevolent Association. "We strongly urge the legislature to pass these key pieces of legislation so together, we can continue to make Florida the safest state in the nation."

"The 28,000 members of the Florida Professional Firefighters strongly support the investment in Florida's firefighters and first responders put forward by Speaker Paul Renner. Public safety is the backbone of Florida's economy," said Wayne "Bernie" Bernoska, President Florida Professional Firefighters. "The components of Speaker Renner's plan will ensure the safety of Floridians for decades to come and make it clear to our men and women in harm's way that their service matters. Florida's Professional Firefighters applaud Speaker Renner and the members of the Florida Legislature cosponsoring these meaningful reforms that restore a dignified retirement, provide a stable workforce through improved recruitment and retention, and improve public safety in our great state."

"Florida is a great state for first responders, and under the leadership of bill sponsors Sen. Ed Hooper and Rep. Demi Busatta Cabrera, the legislature is already moving forward with HB 239 and SB 224 to restore retirement benefit equity for all first responders," said Florida Police Chiefs Association President and Fellsmere Police Department Chief Keith Touchberry. "Now, with this new, comprehensive package of retirement and first responder benefits, Speaker Renner and the Florida House are proving the State of Florida's true commitment to every first responder and their families. The members of the FPCA are incredibly grateful to Speaker Renner for his leadership."

For more information on PCS for HB 239, visit www.myfloridahouse.gov.

###