

Honorable Cindy Evans, Chair
and Members
Committee on Public Safety and
Military Affairs
House of Representatives
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

LATE TESTIMONY

Dear Chair Evans and Members:

In lieu of testifying, on February 14, 2008 hearing on HB2849, I submit the following testimony. I have been employed as a Police Officer with the Honolulu Police Department (HPD), City and County of Honolulu for 25 years. **I strongly support House Bill No. 2849, Relating to Allowance on Service Retirement.**

This bill would allow dispatchers to be in the same category, Class A, as law enforcement officers in the ERS. They would be allowed to retire after 25 years of service without a penalty for my age if under 55 years old. Even though there was a moratorium passed last year on any public employee benefit enhancements like retirement, I think it is very important to bring this bill to your attention.

I am currently assigned as the Swing Shift Watch Commander in the Communications Division. I am the Training Lieutenant in charge of our recruiting and training section. We have great difficulty competing for employees in the current economy. Those people who have the computer skills to do this job are quickly picked up by companies that provide higher salaries and benefits. We are lucky to turn out 5 new trainees a year and several of our staff are fighting cancer and other serious illnesses this past year. In addition, our dispatchers like the rest of society are growing old. Many of them are reaching an age in which they are eligible for retirement. Right now each watch has 31 staff members assigned and we have 20 vacancies. This means that on any given shift when too many people call sick, we force people from the prior shift to stay on duty for a minimum of 4 more hours to ensure public safety.

During the course of my career, I was assigned to Communications on several occasions. In the old days, when they did not know how to handle pregnant officers, we were assigned to dispatch. I was there when all calls were taken on cards and sent on a little conveyor belt to the radios. I was there when the first Computer Aided Dispatch System (CADS) was installed and everyone had to learn how to use a computer. I am here now when we are using a CADS system that is light years past the original system that literally takes one year to train new employees. Not only must the dispatcher navigate the CADS, they must run the state computer, the NCIC computer, the wireless mapping computer as well as the CML that bring in the calls.

Dispatchers are literally wired to their position. They live the most regimented work situation of any division in the police department. They must arrive on time or be written

up. They must relieve staff by a certain time. They must wait for their break. They can't just unplug and go to the bathroom. Each critical position is staffed and only a 10 minute break is allowed. Meals are exactly 45 minutes. Officers have the luxury of taking a break after a big case, not our dispatchers. A child is thrown off the bridge, and my staff took the calls from many citizens yelling at them that their commute has been disturbed and "we should fix it".

Dispatchers chose this profession because they believe they can make a difference. There were several times in my career that my dispatcher saved my life by remembering where I was and sending me help when I was unable to even get to my radio to ask. Dispatchers should have the opportunity to receive enhanced retirement benefits whenever the opportunity is available.

Thank you for taking the time to hear this bill and learn more about these wonderful public servants.

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