

OPENING STATEMENT:

The Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy will come to order.

This is a unique day for the subcommittee, getting out of Washington and coming to Ohio. I always say the best ideas don't come from Washington, they come from Ohio.

That's why I'm looking forward to hearing today from our seven Ohio witnesses, who will share the stories of their lives and their careers, and how their retirement security, and that of their colleagues, is threatened by two old provisions that unfairly cut the Social Security benefits they've earned over years of hard work and service.

First, I want to thank the Columbus Firefighters Local 67, for hosting us here today, and thank you to the officers from the Columbus Police Department that are here.

And the rest of you have come from near and far: you work in our fire halls, our police stations, our schools, our parks, our libraries, and more. You collect garbage and drive buses and keep our streets safe. Thank you all for your commitment to public service.

If you look around this room, you will see that the combined years of service you all bring totals thousands of years of service to Ohio and to this great nation. Thank you.

The witnesses we're about to hear from, and the people here in this room are all dedicated to the communities you serve. You're teachers, firefighters, police officers, sheriffs and deputies, nurses, dispatchers, bus drivers, school support staff, municipal employees, and more.

You didn't go into this work to get rich. You did it because you all heard the call, in one form or another, to make your communities a better place for everyone.

And it's absurd that for decades now, two laws have punished you and your work by cutting the Social Security benefits that you all have earned throughout your lives.

Social Security is a bedrock of our middle class. It's retirement security that Americans pay into and earn over a lifetime of work. Workers count on it to be there for them when they retire.

I'm committed to strengthening Social Security. And that starts with addressing these two old, unfair rules, which prevent more than three million Americans and more than

270,000 Ohioans – some of whom are here today – from receiving the full Social Security benefits you’ve earned.

The laws also punish people who want to start a career in public service. We have a serious problem recruiting and retaining workers – whether it’s cops on the beat or teachers in classrooms. And these laws discourage people from entering service as a second career.

Imagine a young woman who leaves military service and wants to become a cop, only to be told that in addition to the daily challenges of the job, her Social Security benefits – which she earned – will be slashed.

I have spoken to firefighters who waited years to join the fire department – it is a dream come true for them. But fulfilling that dream shouldn’t mean losing the Social Security contributions they’ve made.

Punishing public servants by cutting the Social Security they earned in other jobs is NOT a good way to recruit and retain. It’s a **terrible** way to recruit and retain.

This makes no sense, and it’s why I introduced the *Social Security Fairness Act*.

It’s a simple bill with a simple premise. The bill makes sure cops and firefighters and teachers and other public

workers get the full Social Security they've earned over their careers.

It's an issue that has a huge impact on your lives, but it doesn't get enough attention in Washington. The people it affects aren't powerful special interests – they're local cops and sheriff's deputies, they're firefighters, they're teachers, they work at our parks and libraries, they pick up our trash, and plow our roads.

You hear the term “windfall elimination” and have to wonder: what is this so-called “windfall” that politicians in Washington are talking about? All you're asking for is what you've earned.

This issue reminds me of the pension crisis, which threatened the pensions of 100,000 Ohioans. Hardly anyone in Washington was paying attention. But those Ohioans put it on the agenda and they never gave up.

For years, most people in Washington ignored them. And over and over, these Ohioans watched corporations get tax cuts and Wall Street get bailouts. These pensioners weren't asking for bailouts or handouts, and neither are you.

All you're asking for is what you've earned.

We all remember the pensions fight took a lot longer than it should have – but we got it done. And we’ll do the same thing with the Social Security Fairness Act.

We’ve built more support than ever: but we still need one more.

Followers of DC inside baseball will tell you that 60 votes is the number you need to break a filibuster in the Senate.

I’m announcing here this morning that we’ve added Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden as a cosponsor, which gives us a total of 59 cosponsors on the bill. **59**.

As Chairman Wyden put it in his written statement for this hearing: “These Americans chose a life of service; we should not be unfairly penalizing them.”

I’m proud that this effort has strong bipartisan support. Senator Cassidy, whom I’ve partnered with on a number of issues and is a member of this subcommittee, said this in his statement for this hearing: “There is no public policy reason to treat our public servants this way.” I agree with my friend and colleague from Louisiana.

We’ve built real momentum. We’ll spend this morning hearing from our witnesses and adding to the already

strong case for the Senate to act and to finally restore the full Social Security benefits you've earned.

It's simple: when you love this country, you fight for the people who make it work. That's what all of you spend your days doing, and I won't stop fighting until we make this right.