

## **Testimony in Support of the Repeal of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO)**

Chairman Brown,

My name is Brian Steel, and I represent the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the oldest and largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States. Today, I speak on behalf of approximately 356,000 members who are deeply affected by the injustices of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO).

Since 1997, the FOP has led the charge to repeal these provisions. The current Congress shows unprecedented support for the "Social Security Fairness Act" with 320 cosponsors in the House and 53 in the Senate, and the endorsement from the Problem Solvers Caucus. Despite this overwhelming support, our members continue to face the inequities imposed by the WEP and GPO.

The WEP impacts approximately 1.9 million beneficiaries, including 146,000 retired workers in Ohio alone. Law enforcement officers, in particular, bear a disproportionate burden, with studies indicating that 75% of those affected are in public safety roles. These officers, who often retire earlier due to the physical and mental demands of their careers, find their earned Social Security benefits unfairly reduced. This reduction persists even when they pursue second careers and continue to contribute to the Social Security system.

I received a few emails from retired police officers sharing their stories that I would like to share. Retired CPD Officer Andrea Barret wrote, "I was one of the first ten female officers to begin my career as a Columbus Police Officer assigned to patrol in 1975. Retiring in 2001 after a 26-year fulfilling career, I went to the Social Security Division when I was approaching my 62nd year of life. I supplied them with my work experience before, during, and after my time with the Division, only to be advised that my pension was too high and would be penalized. Instead of getting almost \$800.00 monthly in pre-paid contributions, I receive \$190.00 monthly from the Social Security Administration. This is practically a slap in the face for having worked since I was 15 years of age, told it was all for naught because I chose public service to the community over private service. I pray that something can be resolved to rectify this situation for myself and others similarly situated."

Retired CPD Sgt Tony Luzio wrote, "Having served 37 years as a proud member of the Columbus Ohio Police Department, I feel slighted that because I chose to serve my community, I was penalized from receiving my social security benefits. After graduating from college, I decided to enter the Police Academy rather than take a higher-paying job in the private sector. My wife worked for the first four years of our marriage, quitting in 1979 to become a stay-at-home mother. At this time, I began working countless hours of special duty to supplement our family income for nearly 37 years before I retired. Upon my retirement, It was a slap in the face to see how little of my hard-earned social security I would receive! I'm nearly 73 years old and still working three part-time jobs to supplement my income! The repeal of the WEP would finally allow me to retire fully and enjoy time with my family."

The GPO, while affecting fewer individuals, can have an even more profound impact. Among those affected, 52% are spouses and 48% are widows or widowers. Alarming, 70% of these individuals see their benefits fully eliminated. This denies our eligible survivors the benefits they paid into the system, leaving the funds in the Trust Fund to pay for someone else's benefit.

This is outrageously unfair. Public employees did not create the current challenges facing the Social Security Trust Fund. Yet, Congress forces us to give up our earned benefits, punishing those who serve the public. We are not asking for special treatment, only for what we have rightfully earned—equal treatment under the law.

The existence of WEP and GPO discourages individuals from pursuing careers in law enforcement, exacerbating the current recruiting crisis. For 40 years, Congress has avoided addressing the long-term viability of Social Security and has instead embraced these unfair provisions. If this scheme were managed by a private entity, it would be deemed criminal.

We urge the Committee to act immediately to repeal the WEP and GPO by passing S. 597, the "Social Security Fairness Act." Our members deserve fairness, justice, and the benefits they have earned through their dedicated service. I will close with a quote by my dear friend and fellow labor leader President Steve Stein of Columbus Firefighters Local 67, "When you call us, we are coming." You can count on the men and women of the Police and Fire service to have your back during times of need. Now we are counting on you.

Thank you.