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The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island House of Representatives
Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance,

Please accept the following written testimony in support of H8506 , an Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Relating to Central Falls Pension Plan.

My name is Robert Matook and I am the President of the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 2. On behalf of the members of FOP Lodge 2, I urge passage of H8506. As many of you are aware, prior to the bankruptcy in August 2011, Central Falls police officer pension benefits were on par with most of the municipal police pension benefits statewide. When the bankruptcy hit, active police officers suffered reductions in wages and benefits, as well as drastic cuts to future pension benefits. After the bankruptcy, Central Falls police had the worst (or one of the worst) pension plans in the State for law enforcement. Recruitment and retention of police officers became very difficult over the ensuing years.

Over the last 15 years, financial conditions improved and the City and Lodge 2 have worked cooperatively to make positive changes when possible. Most recently, in 2019, the City and the unions agreed that administration of the plan should be controlled by ERSRI and that new officers would be full members of MERS like most other municipal police officers. That left a group of about 25 older officers out of MERS (the so-called Legacy Plan members).

Just recently, the City and Lodge 2 again worked cooperatively during contract negotiations to make further improvements to the pension plan for the Legacy Plan members only. In order to make that agreement a reality, we need this legislation. All the legislation does is make sure that the benefits in the collective bargaining agreement on July 1, 2026 are preserved going forward. This legislation is the product of cooperation between Lodge 2, the union representing the Central Falls firefighters and the administration.

Thank you in advance for your support for this legislation.

Sincerely,

Robert Matook,
President
Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 2