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Rep. Billy Bob Faulkingham
Testimony in Support

LD 84 An Act To Increase the State Share of Cost of Health Insurance for Retired Teachers.

Good afternoon Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Representative Billy Bob Faulkingham and I am here to present **LD 84 An Act To Increase the State Share of Cost of Health Insurance for Retired Teachers.**

Prior to the Great Recession there were promises made by the state to increase the reimbursement of health insurance to retired teachers by 5% a year until it reached 55%. At some point major changes were made to the pension plan which cost a loss of money received by the retired. As the years went by those promises were forgotten and for a decade and a half no increases have been made.

While health insurance costs continue skyrocketing the amount of retired teacher's pensions remain stagnant. Teachers especially hard hit by this are rural teachers who retired at a very low annual income compared to their big city counterparts. At this point health insurance costs are consuming an absurd percentage of retired teacher's pensions.

What I find especially troubling about this situation is that the teachers who sacrificed the most during their career by taking lower paying wages to dedicate their careers to teaching children in rural areas are then the ones who suffer even more dramatically in retirement because of the low reimbursement from the state.

This particular group of teachers dedicated their lives teaching our students and now they are suffering because of a broken system. It is incumbent upon us to live up to the promises made. These teachers gave up many years of their youth for our children's future we should not turn our back on them in their retirement years.

I am a Republican and I have sponsored this bill because I believe it should be a Republican priority. It is my hope that it will truly be a Democrat priority as well. This bill or versions of it have been in the legislature several times. And the truth of the matter is that it has not passed under Republican or Democrat leadership.

The truth of the matter that I must be honest about to these unfortunate retired teachers is that they have been thrown on the back burner. They are not a priority in Augusta. If they

were a priority in Augusta they would have been included in the Governor's budget. They were not included in the last biennial budget, nor were they included in this biennial budget.

This bill may pass in this committee. This bill may pass in the legislature. But the dirty secret in Augusta is that this is all just lip service, as these bills with a fiscal note attached to them go down to the appropriations committee where they get axed behind closed doors.

So what I ask of this committee today is not only to pass this bill with a unanimous report, but to also come together as colleagues in a bi-partisan fashion and prioritize this bill in the upcoming budget.

Thank you for your time. I will answer any questions you may have.