



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

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STATEMENT BY SAINT PAUL MAYOR RANDY KELLY Minnesota Legislative Joint Commission on Pensions February 23, 2004

Police and firefighters injured in the line of duty deserve fair retirement benefits, and their families should not lose health coverage on account of tragic circumstances. While I was in the legislature I sponsored legislation assuring fair coverage.

We have now had several years of experience with these laws, and some problems have arisen in their implementation. In some instances, it appears that the coverage is being extended to people for whom it was never intended. For example, currently, people apply for in-the-line-of-duty retirement benefits when they may not even have reported a work injury or applied for worker's compensation. We need better procedures to assure that only the valid claims are awarded. Further, state funding is no longer covering the added health care benefits for spouses and dependents, pushing that burden onto local governments for what was intended to be a state obligation.

Accordingly, I support legislation introduced this session to make administrative and funding changes in these laws. As a first step, PERA needs to be more restrictive in granting retirement benefits so that only those who are truly deserving receive the benefits.

These changes are only first steps. We should continue to pursue discussions with interested parties on further modifying these laws to comply with their original intent. Such discussions should include full state funding, changes in the definition of "injured in the line of duty," and requiring that the top elected or appointed local official sign off on any requested pension benefits for officers injured in the line of duty.