
DIGEST

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Jones

HB No. 56

Abstract: Establishes a divided benefit calculation for members of the Municipal Employees' Retirement System (MERS) upon the occurrence of certain earnings increases.

Present law establishes the MERS system and provides for benefits for members of the system. Proposed law retains present law.

Present law provides for the calculation of benefits for members of MERS. Generally, this calculation is as follows:

total years of service x final compensation x accrual rate

and is performed when the member retires, enters DROP, files for disability benefits, or dies while in active service.

Proposed law retains present law for all members who do not qualify for a "divided benefit". Under proposed law, if a member's monthly earnings are 15% or more above his average monthly earnings for the immediately preceding 12 months, the member's benefit shall be divided. Proposed law provides that the member's benefit shall be calculated as the sum of benefits calculated as follows:

- (1) Total years of service prior to the 15% or greater increase in monthly earnings times the final compensation for those particular years of service times the accrual rate for those years of service.
- (2) Years of service on and after the 15% or greater increase in monthly earnings times the final compensation for those particular years of service times the accrual rate for those years of service.
- (3) A benefit shall also be calculated in a similar manner for any period between two increases of 15% or more.

Proposed law further provides that for members with a divided benefit, the member's total years of service within the system shall be aggregated for purposes of retirement eligibility.

Further provides that if a member achieves the qualifications for a divided benefit under proposed law, the divided benefit shall be used to calculate all benefits earned by the member,

including normal retirement benefits, disability benefits, and survivor benefits.

Present law defines "final compensation" as the average monthly earnings of the member during the highest 60 consecutive months of employment (or highest 60 joined months of employment if service was interrupted). Proposed law retains present law for all members who do not have a divided benefit. For members who have a divided benefit, proposed law retains present law making it applicable to all periods of service and further provides that for any period of service less than 60 months, the final compensation shall be the average monthly earnings of the member during the number of months worked.

Present law provides caps on the earnings that may be considered in each year of the final compensation calculation, such that the earnings for the 25th through 36th months cannot exceed 115% of the earnings of the first through 24th months, etc. Proposed law removes these caps for members with a divided benefit because the cap is equal to the earnings increase trigger for a divided benefit.

Proposed law further provides that for the purposes of disability and survivor benefits, "final compensation" shall mean the sum of all final compensation calculations required pursuant to proposed law, each calculation weighted in proportion to the relation between the number of years of service attributable to each calculation and the total number of years of service of the member.

Effective upon signature of governor or lapse of time for gubernatorial action.

(Amends R.S. 11:1732(15); Adds R.S. 11:1732(11.2))