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Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

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Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 18, 2021

Testimony in Favor of SB642
State Retirement and Pension System - COVID-19 Related Death Benefits - Clarification

Fellow members of the Pensions Subcommittee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 632 -- legislation put forward by the Joint Committee on Pensions (JCP) -- which would ensure that we, as a State, fulfill our promise to our State Employees who have served on the front lines throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As background and as cited in our December 9th JCP decision document, “existing law provides a benefit for a line-of-duty death of a member of one of the several systems. These benefits are found under Title 29, Subtitle 2 of the State Personnel and Pensions Article. Generally, if an employee dies or is killed in the performance of their duty, their surviving family members can receive a benefit of an allowance of two-thirds of the member’s average final compensation and payment of member contributions.”

At that meeting we voted to recommend legislation to clarify that line-of-duty death benefits are eligible to be received in the event of a COVID death - and this legislation is the fruition of that vote.

To that effect, Senate Bill 642 will clarify that a system member’s death caused by COVID-19 can be eligible for a line-of-duty death benefit, provided that:

- The member contracted COVID-19 during the state public health emergency declared by Executive Order (beginning March 5th, 2020);
- The member dies as a result of COVID-19; and
- The member’s duties required the member to interact with other people within 14 days prior to the appearance of symptoms consistent with COVID-19, confirmed in writing by a licensed health care provider.

The Bill sunsets the benefit on June 30, 2022 and has a number of reporting requirements necessary for the General Assembly to make future decisions on this policy, including:

- Reporting periodically on any benefits awarded;
- Reporting by December 1, 2021 on the number of applications that have been denied and the aggregate summary of the reasons for which an application was denied.

I respectfully request a favorable recommendation on Senate Bill 642.

