

Recently much attention has been paid to recent changes to PERS with the creation of Tier 5 at the recommendation of the PERS Board, approved by the MS Legislature, and signed by Governor Reeves. We certainly recognize and appreciate the enormous responsibility and difficult decisions involved in managing such a large financial system. We are also appreciative of the hard work by all involved to make sure our retirement system, which touches people across all lines of work, is strong and solvent for future generations. With that being said, the Mississippi Fire Chiefs Association and the Mississippi Fire Fighters Association would be remiss if we did not, once again, point out the detriment of a 35-year retirement date for firefighters in Mississippi.

For several years, these associations, along with sister fire service associations, have worked behind the scenes to stress the point of keeping the retirement age for firefighters to 30 years at the longest. For example, in 2024 we introduced the concept that would give firefighters and law enforcement officers 1 year extra credit for every 4 years worked. Unfortunately, this never received support.

So why is this important? First the physical and mental demands placed on firefighters each and everyday take a costly toll on first responders. This is easily found just by looking at all the recent actions the State of Mississippi has taken to help protect our first responders. We currently have the MS First Responders Health and Safety Act (SB 2835 passed in 2019), approved premium pay for first responders during COVID-19 due to increased health risk involved in response during this time, and most recently the MS First Responder PTSD and Suicide Prevention Task Force (HB1268 passed in 2025) that demonstrate the State's desire to address the physical and mental challenges our first responders face on a daily basis. The same reasons it was important for this legislation to pass are the very reasons we must address the recent increase in retirement age. It is safe to say we all agree our first responders give of their physical and mental equity to serve the citizens of this great state.

For comparison, in Alabama, the retirement age is 62 (age 56 for State Police and certified, full-time firefighter and law enforcement officer) with 10 years or more service. In Louisiana a firefighter is eligible to receive benefits if you have at least 12 years of service and at least age 55, at least 20 years of service at least age 50, or at least 25 years of service at any age. Finally, as recent as 2024, Tennessee Legislature passed early retirement for eligible emergency medical personnel, police officer, or firefighter upon attainment of 25 years of credible service. The evidence supports the concept of a firefighter being in a high stress, high demand job both physically and mentally. To ask our first responder to submit to this for 35 years is not a reasonable request. Obviously, this is a brief analysis of retirement age in neighboring states and not a comprehensive comparison of the entire retirement plan.

We strongly urge the leadership of the MS Legislature to readdress the 35-year retirement age for firefighters in the Great State of Mississippi during the 2026 Legislative Session. We would propose an option as we did previously of one year of additional service for each four years of credible service. Please follow the decisions made previously in recognition of the dangers and stress placed on our first responders by revisiting the 35-year retirement requirement. We thank you for your dedication in the past to our first responder community and being willing to listen and take into consideration the health and safety of those who protect us on a daily basis.

Mississippi Fire Chiefs Association



Kyle Hill, President

Mississippi Fire Fighters Association



Mark Whiteside, President