



**District of Columbia City Council
Committee on Government Operations and the
Environment
Public Hearing on
Bill 19-77,
The “Pension Protection
and Sustainability Amendment Act of 2011”**

**April 4, 2011
1:00 p.m.**

**Washington Teachers’ Union
President Nathan Saunders**

Good afternoon Chairperson Cheh, and Council Members Brown, Catania, Thomas, and Wells. My name is Nathan Saunders. I am here as President of the Washington Teachers’ Union and we are opposed to the “Pension Protection and Sustainability Amendment Act of 2011.”

Many jurisdictions across the nation are currently seeking to reduce pension-related costs. I cannot help but think of what happened a couple weeks ago in Costa Mesa, California where half of the city workers were

laid off due to pension costs. One gentleman committed suicide when notices were handed out. The situation was horrifying.

However, this is not Costa Mesa, California. We have one of the healthiest retirement plans in the nation. In fact, the District of Columbia Retirement Board (DCRB) has won awards. Furthermore, our pension benefits are among the lowest in the nation, and our contribution rates by employees are considered to be quite high. So, why is Mr. Catania now seeking to join in the sweep across the nation by making changes to cost-of-living adjustments and the calculation of eligibility and benefits? The Washington Teachers' Union, directly opposes this proposed bill. To attempt to lower these pension benefits any further would be criminal. Teachers, police officers, and firefighters dedicate their lives to serve our communities. They should not be repaid through the reduction and elimination of their benefits.

Currently, cost-of-living-adjustments are capped at a mere 3 percent. This bill seeks to cut that in half to 1.5 percent. These are earnings that our members depend upon during retirement. Teachers have dedicated numerous years of service to the classroom preparing our children for the future. And how do we repay our teachers for caring for our society's children? By telling them that their service is not valued and their 30 years was in vain.

While the proposed legislation also seeks actuarial studies every three years, the DCRB already performs such studies on a regular basis. This issue was addressed in DCRB Executive Director Stanchfield's letter to Councilmember Mendelsohn. (See Question 8). Additionally, Mr. Catania

is seeking fiscal impact statements which are already required pursuant to D.C. Code §1-206.02(c)(3).

Ultimately, the legislation attacks the contractual rights of our constituents. It is manipulating the current political and economic atmosphere. What we have before us is an economically sound and award-winning retirement and benefits plan; a plan which secures the futures of individuals who have served our community for decades and deserve the right to live comfortably without worry in their later years.

I stand before you, united with my fellow public servants, against this anti-union bill.

Thank you for your time today.