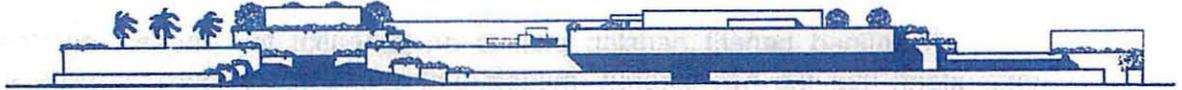




# OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

CONSOLIDATED CITY OF JACKSONVILLE



501 EAST BAY STREET • JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32202-2975

**John H. Rutherford**  
Sheriff

February 18, 2014

William Scheu, Chairman  
Jacksonville Retirement Reform Task Force

Re: My Recommendations for Pension Structure

Thank you very much for the hard work that you and your committee have dedicated to addressing Jacksonville's pension situation. The citizens of Jacksonville are very fortunate to have a dedicated group of individuals willing to explore this important issue. Pensions are important, not only to the employees who receive them, but also to those of us who manage public employees. The pension structure is an essential management tool, allowing us to attract and maintain quality employees. Nowhere is the need to maintain quality, long term employees more important than in public safety.

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office has developed a culture and work ethic of excellence. Our employees have traditionally been long-term, dedicated individuals who have proven themselves effective public servants. Historically, Jacksonville was geographically isolated from other major law enforcement employers, and therefore we enjoyed a built-in advantage over other law enforcement agencies. However, in the last 20 years, we have seen the growth of sheriff's offices and police departments in surrounding counties. Employment with these other agencies has become more attractive, and therefore we find ourselves competing against a number of various agencies in northeast Florida for quality recruits. Further, today's law enforcement officer is better educated and we find that an increasing number of our recruits come from locations outside of northeast Florida, and we need to be able to therefore compete with law enforcement agencies, both throughout Florida and in other states as well. Since Sheriff Glover instituted Baccalaureate college education requirements for Police officers in the 1990's, we have increasingly been forced to compete against both other agencies and other careers for the officers whom we attract.

I have been informed that your task force is evaluating two options: Modifying the current defined benefit plan to adjust benefits paid to law enforcement officers and firefighters; and establishing a new "hybrid" plan which would pay a certain amount of defined benefit, but reserve a portion of the pension contributions for use in a 401(k) style defined contribution plan. While a hybrid plan may seem to be the best of both



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worlds to many, its reliance on a defined contribution component would seriously undermine our goals in maintaining a quality law enforcement agency.

A defined benefit pension plan is an essential tool for law enforcement. I understand that the two different models that you have reviewed provide a different benefit structure over time, with the defined benefit model experiencing a significant increase in value to the employee after 25 years, while the hybrid plan provides more gradual and less dramatic jump throughout the first 25 years of employment. Twenty-five years is an optimal period of employment for law enforcement officers. While we do have a number of older officers, who would continue in their careers, it is much less common for persons in their 50's to be able to continue with the physically demanding job in law enforcement. While we attempt various methods to maintain the physical fitness and health of our officers and we always emphasize the importance of physical fitness, the human body simply does not behave after age 50, and it is not realistic to expect that police officers after such age will perform as well in a uniformed patrol assignment. The defined benefit's dramatic increase in value at the 25-year mark therefore serves a very legitimate human resources goal of maintaining a police officer in his or her position until the 25-year mark but providing an incentive for the officer to leave fairly soon afterwards. Simply put, it is in management's (and the taxpayer's) interest to maintain a benefit that rewards twenty-five year employment, and discourages an officer from leaving before that time.

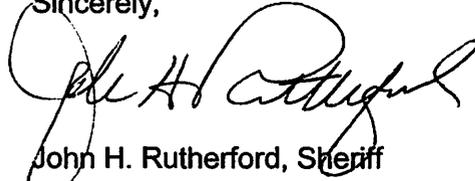
Law enforcement management requires careful training and evaluation of police officers when they begin employment. The majority of our disciplinary-related problems occur in the first years of a law enforcement officer's career. We have specifically developed a longer probationary period than any other public employer in Jacksonville to be able to evaluate the performance of new law enforcement officers. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office has always taken very seriously the obligation and need to train its officers. Our police recruit program creates a separate classification of employee, so that an individual must work as a police recruit before even being moved to the position of police officer. The police officer then must serve a one-year probationary period before beginning civil service tenure. We have found that the development of a longer period of evaluation and training is critical to the development of a professional police department. The evaluation and training period is lengthy and cost intensive, and we have estimated that the cost of developing a new police officer is approximately \$70,000. For this reason, we simply cannot risk moving to another pension system that would enhance employee turnover; doing so would jeopardize public safety, cost too much money in retraining and divert too many law enforcement resources.

From a management perspective, maintaining the current defined benefit pension structure, with adjustments to those benefits will assist us in maintaining a quality workforce at a reasonable cost to the taxpayers. Moving to the hybrid plan would place us in a serious competitive disadvantage in hiring and maintaining police officers, and will likely cost more in the future as we find ourselves needing to pay more to those officers to prevent them from moving to other agencies or other careers. For these reasons,

moving to a hybrid system would weaken the goals of effective law enforcement in our city.

Thank you again for the important work you are performing, and the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of your review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Rutherford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "H".

John H. Rutherford, Sheriff  
Duval County, Florida

JHR/ljm