

# Protect Ohio Pensions 4th Quarter 2021

*Retirees & Current Employees Working Together to Preserve Ohio's Public Pensions*

## Insight From the Administrator

By Maryfrances Kamyar



In Memory of  
Mr. William I. Winegarner

It is with great sadness that we inform the members of Protect Ohio Pensions, Inc., of the passing of our executive director, Mr. William I. Winegarner. He was the spearhead of our organization, leading us into an understanding of the daily workings of public pension systems and their service to us.

Like all organizations who form with a purpose for advocacy, someone must see a need, someone must have the idea. Mr. Winegarner spent 22 years as the executive director of Public Employee Retirees, Inc., during that time, he came to understand the workings of public pension systems, and the responsibility of their boards to the retirees to provide a retirement commensurate with their service. He fought for retiree benefits using his abilities to work with the pension system, pension system trustees and lawmakers.

While serving through those 22 years, Mr. Winegarner watched as retirement plans of private companies were devastated by raiders or mismanagement, being shut down and switched over to various forms of defined-contribution plans.

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## The Legislative Report

By Steve Buehrer, Esq.



When I first met Bill Winegarner, I was impressed with his knowledge and passion. Many people in Bill's life situation would already have abandoned the world of work for fishing boats and golf clubs, but not Bill.

Here was a man who enjoyed coming to work and being involved in something important. Bill spent the last decades of his life fighting for the dignity and stability of public pensions—even though he wasn't drawing one.

He had built a great knowledge of how the system worked, who the players were and how to get things done. Bill wanted to be in the ring when the debates were taking place, not for the personal attention of it, but because he believed so passionately about the issues and the "right" way to do things. He was well read on issues and would try out his opinions on those who cared to listen. My experience on more than one occasion was that not only were his facts correct, but so were his opinions. I will remember Bill for his passions and how he used them to create—literally in the backroom at his house—the POP5 organization and its focused mission on protecting Ohio's public pension systems. Few people would have taken on this fight—especially without some personal gain. Bill was one of those "few" people.

I am pleased to have worked with him. And, in addition to his wonderful family, the POP 5 organization is a fitting legacy to Bill that we all can share.

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## RETIREES & WORKERS

Administrator Continued from Pg 1:

He knew it would not be long before the public pensions came under the scrutiny of those who would like to control their large investments, looking for any reason to push for a defined-contribution plan for all public employees.

“Some politicians want to use our funds for their benefit and not ours. Corporations want to eliminate the power that defined-benefit systems have to protect our pension investments. Stockbrokers want to earn huge fees from individual retirees.”

W. I. Winegarner

When Mr. Winegarner resigned from PERI in 2015, this was his idea for Protect Ohio Pensions, Inc.:

The purpose of this nonprofit, non-partisan association shall be: To support and protect the defined-benefit pension plans of the following Ohio public pension systems: Public Employees, State Teachers, School Employees, Police & Fire, and Highway Patrol.

We are thankful for Mr. Winegarner’s years of service, the knowledge he imparted to us, and his legacy of caring and advocacy for our public employees.

Protect Ohio Pensions will continue, aware of the need to keep a watchful eye on any movement toward defined-contribution plans for the public employees of Ohio.



## STANDING TOGETHER

Legislative Continued from Pg 1:

Despite Bill’s passing, we march forward with our work on behalf of POP5. As I have reported in recent editions of this newsletter, pension reform has not been a priority of the General Assembly during the past year. In the waning days of 2021, the legislature is taking on a host of topics including health care, vaccines and sports gaming in addition to many others.

Much of the time since the summer recess has been spent on the once-a-decade task of redrawing the legislative district lines for the state and the congressional seats. These processes take place every 10 years based on the new census data that becomes available to the states. The delay by the federal government in concluding the population survey changed this year’s process, as did a pair of reforms to the Ohio Constitution. Despite some twists and turns as well as arguments and debate, both maps were passed. Since the final versions of the new districts did not gain any minority party votes in the process, the maps will now be in place for only four years under the newly modified constitutional provisions.

However, before the maps could go into effect, various voter advocates challenged the maps in the Ohio Supreme Court. The Court has already heard arguments on the state maps, while the federal districts will also be considered in an expedited fashion. The Court is expected to issue decisions fairly soon, which will set forth the next steps in this now uncertain process. Central to all of this activity is the fact that these decisions go a long way in determining who will run and ultimately hold office. Furthermore, those who hold office will determine the legislation that comes before the General Assembly (and Congress), and what gets debated and passed into law. Stay tuned as the next steps in this redistricting process play out.

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I retired in January 2016, about the same time that Bill Winegarner founded Protect Ohio Pensions (POP5). I did not realize how new the organization was when I got a mailing inviting me to join. I was already a member of PERI, the OPERS retiree membership organization. I thought Bill's name sounded familiar but did not piece together until later that he had been the Executive Director of PERI for many years. The mission of POP5, to protect all 5 of Ohio pensions, appealed to me because I understood that there is strength in numbers and that collective action is often more effective than individual efforts. So, I joined POP5 too and started to educate myself about pensions. A primary source of information was the POP5 website, with many of the articles written by Bill.

Not long after I joined, there was a request for volunteers to serve on the POP5 Board. When I first met Bill, I was struck by the fact that he was a man who had a vision and the experience to build an organization from scratch. His expertise regarding pension issues and defined benefits was extraordinary. He wanted to share his knowledge and unite pension recipients to work together to protect what we have.

One of the most surprising things I learned about Bill is that he had not been a public employee and was not a pension recipient. His passion to protect defined benefits was altruistic and he was committed to working for the good of public employment retirees because he believed the current system is a great one and should be preserved. To that end, he devoted countless hours on building the POP5 membership and outreach to all the pension systems decision makers and their retiree associations.

Because he built a solid foundation, POP5 will be able to continue Bill's legacy of working together to protect and preserve Ohio defined-benefit pension plans.

Nancy King  
Secretary, POP5



Legislative Continued from Pg 2:

As we look ahead to 2022, the General Assembly will return in early January for several months of work before the summer break, and ultimately the elections in the fall.

When the General Assembly reconvenes, POP5 will be waiting to engage in the debates that may surface concerning Ohio's public pension systems. That is what Bill would have wanted, and that is certainly what we will continue to do in the days ahead.



I have always had the greatest respect for Bill Winegarner. Whenever his name was mentioned, there was always the expectation that something good was about to be said.

When I first learned of Bill, he was serving as one of the leaders of a national Christian ministry. People would talk of his intelligence, kindness, boldness and service.

When Bill and his family moved to the Columbus area to work with a local ministry, I had the opportunity to meet him in person. His reputation proved to be accurate.

I found myself to be in a bit of awe of his absolute dedication to the Bible and its tenets. There was certainly no compromising there!

Eventually, Bill and I and our families ended up becoming good friends.

Bill always demonstrated great intelligence and wisdom in a multitude of situations, and he did it all with conviction and compassion. He had the heart of a teddy bear in spite of his dominating force.

I feel privileged to not only have met Bill, but to have had him as a friend, and someone who I cherished very much.

Candace Shicks  
Vice Chair, POP5



William Winegarner and I were friends and business associates for nearly 20 years. He was a trustworthy and honorable man, he loved his family, and was loyal to his faith.

All who knew Bill enjoyed hearing stories of his life experiences, which included tales from his childhood growing up in Worthington, Ohio, his military service with the U.S. Army in Alaska, and his travels across the country and around the world.

He held a juris doctorate, and was an ordained

minister working extensively in Christian ministry. He was a successful real estate broker and business consultant.

Bill Winegarner dedicated a good portion of his life to the preservation of the pension systems of Ohio. It is fair to say that they owe a great deal to Bill for his many years of advocacy.

Keith Kleiber  
Data Manager, POP5



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