

December 17, 2013

State of Michigan – Governor’s Office
Attention: Governor Rick Snyder
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

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VOID
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U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT
E.D. MICHIGAN-DETROIT

RE: City of Detroit Financial Emergency

Dear Governor Snyder:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the financial state of affairs for the City of Detroit. The recent decision regarding allowing the city to declare bankruptcy has the possibility to yield negative consequences for thousands of citizens. These consequences will be especially catastrophic for the retirees who are at risk of losing, or reducing, their pensions. This issue is especially important to me as many of my family and friends are retired from the City of Detroit.

My father worked as a Detroit Police officer for 29 years. During that time, he made many concessions in exchange for a Pension and Health Insurance Benefits. There were many years that he went without a raise. Besides the financial compensation, the working conditions inside his precinct were deplorable. Today, those conditions would not have passed an OSHA investigation. The air conditioning rarely worked and the windows were stuck shut. The place was never cleaned. Black handprints could be seen on the stair railings. The white linoleum was gray from the dirt and dust left on it. The equipment he needed to do his job was non-existent. He actually had an old ‘hunt and peck’ typewriter that he would use to complete his reports. He had to bolt it to his desk so that someone didn’t steal it.

Despite all of this, he trudged along and worked for 29 years. The community and press offered little to no support for the police. The City Council and Mayor’s office were frequently quoted as being unsupportive of the Police Officers and spoke negatively in public about the functioning of the police. Flags were not raised to support Police Officers and Fire Fighters, as you frequently see in many other cities. There was no pride in being a Detroit Police Officer – the only benefit was the security of knowing that your financial well being and health would be taken care of after retirement.

After 29 years, my father retired. Upon retiring, he was promised a pension and health insurance. He did not pay into social security. My mother did not work – she was a stay at home mom. The only source of income and health insurance after retirement were these promised benefits. Now, after years of mismanagement and corruption, it is again the Police Officers who are set to suffer. It is understandable that Detroit has no money and is in ruins. The decline of the city has been happening for years, assistance at the state level has been understandably limited as the slow decline occurred. Now, when the bottom is falling out, the outside is stepping in.

There is no dispute that the City is in bad shape and that something needs to be done. However, this burden should not be shouldered by the retirees who selflessly served the city for so many

years. These retirees held up their end of the bargain – they went years and years without cost of living raises, they worked without properly operating equipment, they endured terrible, and often dangerous, working conditions. Now, despite all of this, they are set to lose the only valuable item that they worked for. I find it appalling and disgusting how easily lawmakers and legal entities can ignore, or discount, the implication that this situation has to thousands of retired workers. The concern only seems to center around the City and its ‘creditors’, with little thought applied to the real life people that this tragedy will negatively effect.

If the city is unable to pay its retirees, as promised, then the State should step in and work to help make those payments. The City of Detroit is an extension of the Government of the State of Michigan. Since the City of Detroit has failed, and has been failing for years, the State should honor its workers and support their pensions. If the city eliminates the pension benefits of the retirees, and the State does not step in, the State can expect to shoulder the burden anyway as the vast majority of these retirees will not be able to afford to live independently. With the loss of pension income, many will be forced into low income status and have to pursue state subsidies including food stamps and Section 8 housing. With the loss of health insurance, many will likely have to apply for Medicaid before their Medicare benefits take effect.

The financial state of the City of Detroit is a sad situation. Unfortunately, it is not a situation that was unforeseen nor is it a situation that should be paid for by those who worked so many years to help maintain the city. If the retirees are forced to pay through a loss or cut in their pension, it is safe to assume that costs for the State will go up. Rather than seeing the State financially support the retirees through low income and Medicaid benefits, the state should step in and do the morally responsible thing. Support and protect those citizens who spent so many of their years devoted to a City that has had no devotion to them.

Sincerely,

Paul Bar, PT
Son of Retired Detroit Police Officer, Timothy Bar

Cc: Editor, Detroit News
Judge Steven W. Rhodes
City of Detroit Retired Police Union