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Good Afternoon!

Mr. Chair Mullica, Members of the Committee, my name is Irene Martinez Jordan. I am a volunteer with AARP Colorado. AARP has over 600,000 members in Colorado and is focused on Coloradans age 50 and above, as well as their families. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today.

AARP strongly supports SB23-056,

Colorado educators spend a lifetime serving students and families. State workers spend a lifetime making sure that our state runs smoothly, implementing the very laws that you, the state legislature, created. SB23-056 ensures that the retirement benefits that you, the state, promised to educators and state workers are there when they need it.

PERA is not an institution to be attacked and whittled away, it is the alternative to social security that our state created to protect its employees in their retirement years.

SB23-056 will allow you to take pride in your creation and will add value to that creation. It has appeared that every year the state legislature keeps diminishing the value of its state's retirement plan and in effect diminishing the value of your teachers and state employees. This year alone you are looking at least six bills involving PERA.

I am a retired educator, my husband was an educator and my son is a teacher in Delta County. Seeing the inadequate pay and the deterioration of the PERA retirement plan I once said to my son, "If I had been a better parent you would be a doctor instead of a teacher." He smiled at me and said, "Mom, I love what I do." The fact that he is an excellent dedicated teacher made it even more discouraging to me as a mother and former educator when I learned that my son's children qualify for free and reduced lunch.

We all know that teachers are under paid but one reason they continue investing in their profession is their belief that they will have a quality pension plan. Unfortunately, circumstances have hacked away at what was once a quality pension.

Social Security and PERA are the only guaranteed inflation-adjusted sources of income most retirees can count on during retirement. This year Social Security beneficiaries will get an 8 to 11% increase, the biggest cost of living increase in 40 years. PERA retirees will get 1%.

We recognize that some of you have attempted to correct the results of those circumstances.

Attempt #1 -In 2018. SB 18-200 pledged to make a yearly contribution of \$225 million to PERA and designed a plan to get PERA to solvency with a shared responsibility that increased contributions by employers and employees and a decrease in retiree's annual cost of living adjustments (COLA). Employers, employees and retirees have followed this shared responsibility in good faith but the state has not.

Then -In 2020 you suspend that direct distribution for the 2020-21 fiscal year. This missed payment resulted in millions of dollars loss to PERA.

Attempt #2 - In 2022 HB22-1029 committed to reinstate the state's missed payment from 2020 of \$225 million into the PERA system. However, the additional direct distribution did not fully compensate PERA for the cancellation of the previously scheduled direct distribution.

So now we have –

Attempt #3 -Today SB-056 is the third attempt to bring the state into compliance with its yearly commitment under SB18-200. You have the opportunity to finally make it whole by appropriating the \$35.1 million to the unfunded liability for PERA.

Please make this third attempt your charm time.

Show your teachers and state workers that that you care about them and you appreciate their hard work. Pass SB23-056.

I thank you.