



City of Houston refutes claim that Abbott pensions guru McGee blasted Turner pension plan

City says Texas Pensions Board Chairman's comments were cherry picked; firefighters' fund will fight Turner to the end in the House

In their push to reform Houston's pension system, the city's team at the *Texas Capitol* today is pushing back against an assertion made by the firefighters' fund that Gov. **Greg Abbott's** pensions guru has warned lawmakers against approving Mayor **Sylvester Turner's** plan.

The plan still needs the approval of the *Texas House*.

After the *Texas Senate* approved the plan on a vote of 25 to 5, **Dave Keller** of the *Houston Firefighters Relief and Retirement Fund* suggested that **Josh McGee**, the Chairman of the *Texas Pension Review Board* appointed by Abbott, had warned lawmakers against approving Turner's plan.

"As focus moves to the House vote on HB 43, we draw legislators' attention to PRB Chairman Josh McGee's late-breaking alarm last week, that the likelihood of large benefits cuts with even minor misses under the City's corridor provision could cause waves of early retirements among Houston police and firefighters," Keller said in a written statement to *Quorum Report* on Monday.

But the city says McGee did no such thing and, in fact, the *John and Laura Arnold Foundation* – where McGee [is a vice president](#) – took out a full-page ad in the *Houston Chronicle* this past Sunday supporting Turner's plan.

You can see that ad by [clicking here](#).

"Unfortunately, this is not a one-time occurrence with HFRRF, in fact it has been a historical pattern. The reason Houston has had this problem comes from benefits increases cemented into law over 15 years ago," said **Bill Kelly**, Director of Government Relations for the mayor's office.

Kelly [pointed to this letter](#) from former Houston **Mayor Lee P. Brown** written in April of 2000 in which the group had indicated their benefits would have a minimal cost to the city and Mayor Brown expressing his approval for those numbers.

"Those numbers were far from accurate, to say the least," Kelly said. "To be clear, Mayor Brown was responding to what HFRRF presented him, not his own calculations."

Meantime, Mayor Turner was distributing [this letter](#) to Texas House members on Wednesday.

Kelly said the firefighters' have refused to provide actuarial data to back up their claims.

The firefighters' fund had no immediate response to the assertion that they cherry picked McGee's comments.

Instead, the Houston Firefighters Relief and Retirement Fund highlighted [this memo](#) they prepared back in March.

The pensions plan bill may be on the floor of the House as soon as Saturday.

By Scott Braddock