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San Antonio Chamber Board Votes to Support Changes in Police/Fire Healthcare Benefits

SAN ANTONIO (April 24, 2014) – The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors today voted to support cost cutting changes in the fire and police health insurance benefits that are a part of their labor union’s collective bargaining agreement.

According to Board Chairman, David McGee, “the Board’s vote reflects the business community’s recommendation that our city balance strong support for our public safety personnel with the need to maintain a healthy city budget as we grow and plan for our future.”

The position statement adopted by the Board states that the Chamber supports removing the active-duty public safety employees’ healthcare benefits from the collective bargaining process, so the city can continually monitor and manage the rising costs of healthcare provided to city employees. This recommendation would place San Antonio’s policy on similar terms as the other large cities in Texas.

The Board’s vote followed several weeks of study and committee meetings including two sessions with representatives of the fire and police unions. “We made it clear that we want to understand the position of all sides in this issue and concluded that fire and police healthcare costs are unsustainable in the long run and a change must be made,” said Richard Perez, President and CEO of the Chamber.

Other key points in the Chamber’s position statement include:

- City leadership must develop guidelines for a proper balance where the Public Safety Budget does not exceed a certain percentage of

the total General Fund Budget.

- The City's police and firefighter healthcare benefits should more closely mirror the premiums, deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses of the city's civilian employees.
- The city should develop a strategy to address the state statute limiting the flexibility to modify the structure of the pension funds for public safety employees in preparation for the 2015 State Legislative Session.
- The city should continue to study pre-funded healthcare for public safety retirees and study alternatives to provide them coverage from the time they retire to the time they become eligible for Medicare benefits, and explore options such as bridge insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

“The San Antonio Chamber is the region's leading advocate for business growth, development and commerce and the city is a major contributor to our successful pro-business environment. The healthcare landscape has drastically changed since the contract with the police and fire unions was struck 25 years ago and it's time the city and public safety personnel begin paying a fair share of their healthcare costs,” concluded McGee.

The City of San Antonio is currently in negotiations with the San Antonio Police and Firefighter Unions. Discussions are focused upon the possibility of the unions agreeing to contribute a small percentage toward the premium on their healthcare plan. Currently, they contribute nothing for themselves or their dependents.

[Download the position statement online at the Chamber's website.](#)