

RETIREE NOTES



In a March 7 news conference, retirees called on legislators to make an additional pension payment in the next fiscal year.

Retirees back better state pension funding

“I RELY ON MY PENSION TO get by,” Patricia Johnson, an AFSCME retiree from Chicago, said to a room full of reporters. “For paying my rent, my car loan, my food, and for medicine. In my case, I have a blood disorder where I get blood clots, and the medication that I’m on is very expensive.”

Johnson was one of dozens of AFSCME retirees from around the state who converged on Springfield March 7 to urge lawmakers to better fund their pensions. They joined with retired teachers under the banner of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans for a news conference supporting Governor JB Pritzker’s proposal to not only make the state’s required pension payment this year, but to contribute an additional \$500 million on top of that.

The state’s contribution goes to the State Employees Retirement System (SERS), State University Retirement System (SURS), Teachers Retirement System (TRS), Judges Retirement System (JRS), and General Assembly Retirement System (GARS).

Politicians created the pension debt by skipping or shorting required payments over a period of decades. That debt threatens the stability of the retirement systems and

fuels attacks by those who want to slash the modest benefits promised to future retirees.

Governor Pritzker’s plan to pay down that extra \$500 million early was projected to save \$1.8 billion in the long run. In the end, the General Assembly voted to approve an extra \$300 million payment.

“Our top priority is to safeguard pensions.”

Although it’s not as much as retirees wanted and the governor proposed, “It’s a win for all Illinoisans because it will result in saving even more money and seeing the state’s credit rating improve,” said Eric Kenney, an AFSCME retiree from Sullivan who spoke at the event. “[It’s] what’s right and what is fiscally responsible.”

Cook County pension legislation

IN THE SPRING LEGISLATIVE session, AFSCME Chapter 31 supported HB 4980, legislation introduced by the County Employees’ and Officers’ Annuity and Benefit Fund of Cook County and the Forest Preserve District Employees’ Annuity and Benefit Fund of Cook County (CCPF). The bill

proposes replacing the current inadequate funding model with a mechanism that will guarantee that employer’s contributions toward retirement benefits are sufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension fund.

As *On the Move* went to print, HB 4980 was stuck in the House Rules Committee.

Established decades ago, the funding language in the pension code for CCPF calculates the county’s contributions at a level significantly lower than what is needed to properly fund retirement benefits.

HB 4980 requires actuarial-based funding for CCPF as is done for the other large public pension plans in the state. While it will increase county contributions, actuarial funding is the key to maintaining fiscal health for a pension plan because it is based on refined, yearly calculations of what investments are necessary to make all benefit payments in the future.

While in recent years the Cook County Board has provided additional contributions to CCPF to supplement its inadequate statutorily required payment, this arrangement must be approved annually with no guarantee that it will be done by future Cook County Boards. If supplemental contributions are not maintained, it would result in increased costs to taxpayers over the long-term and could exhaust the pension funds, meaning pension benefits could not be paid out.

“Retirees live on fixed incomes, so our top priority is to safeguard pensions,” AFSCME Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe said. “That’s why this legislation is so important. It only makes sense that the General Assembly pass this legislation to ensure the long-term fiscal stability of the Cook County Pension Fund and a fiscally secure path forward for both taxpayers and Cook County retirees.”

Chapter 31 loses long-time champion

“WE ARE BETTER AS AN organization because of the diligence and dedication of our former Southern-Vice President, Dorothy Asbury who passed away on March 29,” stated Larry Brown, president of AFSCME Illinois Retirees Chapter 31. “While we are sad at her passing, we are forever grateful for the work she did to

sub-chapter before becoming president in 2001 and state-wide southern vice-president in 2003.

Dorothy never backed down from a political fight, whether it was protesting Congressman Shimkus’ support of Social Security privatization in 2003 or taking part in a truth tour around southern Illinois to bring attention to the high cost of prescription drugs for seniors.

When demonstrating to prevent the closure of Murray Developmental Center, in 2012 she spoke at a news conference against Gov. Quinn’s plan to displace disabled residents: “I cannot see where this will save the state money, but I can definitely see where it will cause harm.”

Dorothy was inducted into the AFSCME Chapter 31 Hall of Fame based on her demonstrated commitment to her sub-chapter and Chapter 31. “She focuses on organizing our Chapter wherever she goes,” said Executive Board member Dick Dawdy at her induction,



Subchapter President 59 Dorothy Asbury walking in the Labor Day Parade.

“We will all be better off because of the standard she set.”

fight for retirement security for all and build our organization.”

Dorothy, who passed away at the end of March, became a member of the Alton’s retiree sub-chapter 59 over 22 years ago after retiring from Alton Mental Health Center. She became an executive board member and trustee within the

“and makes it her mission to help retirees speak with as strong a voice as possible—because we earned the right to retire with dignity.”

“While it is difficult to say goodbye,” said Larry Brown, “we will all be better off because of the standard she set, and her friendship.”