

Proposed 2018-19 Legislative Principles, Successes, and Activities

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The Legislative Committee of the Urbana Chapter of the SUAA operates according to a set of legislative principles:

Legislative Principles

- Achieving fiscal stability as soon as possible is the most critical step for Illinois state government. Our state continues to face enormous structural deficit and budget problems. No effective long-term planning or progress is possible without stability.
- No single mechanism is sufficient to achieve fiscal stability. A combination of budget cuts, budget reform and new revenue measures is required.
- Higher Education is critically important to economic growth for Illinois, both in terms of delivering a technologically sophisticated work force and in generating new business growth via commercialization of university-based research and development.
- Competitive benefit programs are essential to attract and retain faculty and staff to sustain higher education's role in economic development.
- University leaders, current employees and annuitants must work together to address benefit and state budget issues.
- Current retirement programs for higher education and other public employees in Illinois are not overly generous. Indeed, most institutions with which the University of Illinois competes for talented faculty and staff invest substantially more in retirement programs for their employees. Unlike Illinois, virtually all such programs combine Social Security and supplemental institutional benefits.

SUAA's Legislative Successes

Several lawsuits have been resolved recently which protected benefits to our annuitants by reaffirming that the retirement provisions enacted in PA 98-599 violated the non-impairment clause of the state constitution as well as ensuring the provision of health care benefits to annuitants. SUAA established a legal fund to retain counsel to represent SUAA members in these court cases and is prepared to retain counsel in the future if needed.

Illinois' 2012 general election ballot included a Constitutional Amendment proposed by the General Assembly that would have changed benefit processes. The language of the proposed Amendment was confusing and its purposes obscure and unclear. A leading expert on the Illinois Constitution characterized the proposal as "catastrophic." SUAA established a ballot initiative group, separate from SUAA, and successfully worked to defeat the Amendment.

Given the state's current deficit and worst-in-the-nation pension funding (attributable to the state's failure to pay the employer's share for the program) it is certain that new pension reform legislation and possibly constitutional amendments will be forthcoming.

Accordingly, we must remain vigilant and active to ensure our benefits are protected and remain whole. Employees have paid every penny required of them, and SURS investment earnings have exceeded benchmarks. Our legislative committee is active in:

- Assessing and analyzing proposed legislative bills
 - Monitoring the work of the General Assembly on pensions and benefits.
 - Monitoring legislative actions on possible revenue measures (a so-called "fair tax"), funding of higher education, the structure of higher education and other reforms as they relate to P to 12 education and criminal justice reforms.
 - Publishing a statement outlining what is required to pass a constitutional amendment in Illinois.
- Meeting with legislators who represent districts that include the U of I to assess how we can work together.
- Meeting with University administrators to determine how we can work together with them to advance the University's positions.

It is important to point out that the focus of this work is relevant for the interests of annuitants as well as current employees.