

Legislative Report
September 2021

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Good news: IL State Pensions stable for the first time in years

For the first time in years, Illinois received some good news about state pensions.

A study from the PEW Charitable Trusts found that the state's pension systems are "stable." Across the country, those systems are in their best positions since the recession in 2008.

The teacher retirement system is one of several different funds Illinois pays into every year. System administrators said the news is something to be happy about, but they point out the problem is still very present.

"That is a big obstacle yet to overcome, but with this, we have definitely taken the first steps," said Dave Urbanek of the Illinois Teacher Retirement System.

Experts credit a high return on investments for the improvement. (IL Policy Institute)

Bad news: High Pension costs hit homeowners through property taxes, report finds

Over the last 20 years, Illinoisians have seen a 65% increase in residential property taxes, giving the state one of the nation's highest tax burdens.

The state of Illinois has the 6th highest property taxes in the nation and that number is climbing due to the large number of underfunded pensions the state and local governments have. Illinois also has the second highest pension debt in the nation.

Adam Schuster, of the IL Policy Institute said pension fund bills at the local level are growing as well. A large percentage of property taxes goes to school districts, but with rising pension obligations more state funds are spent on pensions, leaving more classroom costs for school districts to fund through property taxes. (The Center Square)

IL Legislation Updates

- Gov. JB Pritzker on Wednesday, Sept. 15, signed into law a sweeping energy regulation overhaul that aims to phase out carbon emissions from the energy sector by 2045 while diversifying the renewable energy workforce.
- Illinois Democrats late Tuesday, August 31, approved new legislative boundaries over objections from Republicans and some community groups that the process was unnecessarily rushed and maps were drawn behind closed doors to keep Democrats in power in the state legislature. Tuesday's vote is a do-over of legislative maps that majority Democrats approved and Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed earlier this year. Those maps prompted lawsuits from top Illinois Republicans and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, a Latino civil rights organization,

who argued that the maps were flawed and unconstitutional because they were based on population estimates from the American Community Survey rather than the 2020 census. (Daily Herald, Sept. 2). NOTE: Even though the bill has been signed into law by the Governor, re-districting still has to face a lawsuit. Trial dates for the lawsuit are being held from September 27 – 29, 2021. The decision from the lawsuit will determine the validity of the Illinois legislature for the next ten years (SUAA Mini Briefing, September 27, 2021).

- Starting Jan. 1, a new state task force will study the status of journalism across the state and make recommendations for improvement to the Illinois General Assembly. Gov. J.B. Pritzker recently signed Senate Bill 134 into law. The law was designed to promote and help local journalism. The legislation forms a 15-person task force called the Local Journalism Task Force. The task force will conduct a comprehensive study relative to communities underserved by local journalism in Illinois, review all aspects of local journalism including, but not limited to, the adequacy of press coverage of communities, print and digital business models for media outlets, the impact of social media on local news, strategies to improve local news access, and public policy solutions to improve the sustainability of local press business models and private and nonprofit solutions, and submit findings and recommendations to the governor and General Assembly by Jan. 1, 2023.
- The fall Veto Session is currently scheduled for October 19-21 and 26-28.
- Incumbents are already preparing for the 2022 election. The Primary Election will not be held until June 28, 2022. The General Election date does not change, it is Tuesday, November 8, 2022 (SUAA Mini Briefing, September 27, 2021).