



## Teachers' Retirement System of the State of Illinois

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Letter to the Editor  
Freeport Journal-Standard  
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Freeport, Illinois 60132  
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To the editor:

A recent guest column in the Journal-Standard from the Illinois Policy Institute about public pensions contains several incorrect statements.

For one, it is incorrect to say that “the pension systems are independent of state government.” All of Illinois’ public pension systems, including Teachers’ Retirement System, were created by state government, are governed by state law and are dependent on state funding. The General Assembly dictates the eligibility requirements for retirees and sets the size of pension benefits.

Second, it is incorrect to say that public pensions, including TRS benefits, are not guaranteed by the state in the event the System cannot pay those benefits. The IPI misread state law and used language that applies only to local police and firefighter pension systems to make this erroneous claim.

The payment of TRS benefits is specifically guaranteed by state government. The law, found at 40 ILCS 5/16-158(c) says:

“Payment of the required State contribution and of all retirement annuities, death benefits, refunds, and all other benefits granted or assumed by this System, and all expenses in connection with the administration and operation thereof, are obligations of the State.”

Third, the proposed legislation to guarantee state funding for the pension systems does not refer to the payment of pension benefits, as implied by the IPI. Benefits already are guaranteed. The legislation, in fact, would create a guarantee that the state will pay its full annual contribution to the pension systems instead of diverting funds to other budget items. For decades, state government has annually diverted millions of dollars away from the pension systems. Those shortfalls created the large unfunded liabilities which now plague TRS and the other state systems.

As state government continues to debate the future of public pensions in Illinois, it is important that we engage in an honest conversation about the problems facing the retirement systems that are based on accurate facts.

Sincerely,

Dick Ingram  
Executive Director  
Teachers' Retirement System