



Teachers' Retirement System of the State of Illinois

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Talk Back
The Baltimore Sun
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To the Editor:

Thomas A. Firey's recent suggestion in the July 26 Sun of a statewide "buy-back" program for public employees to reduce Maryland's future public pension should be vetted very closely by citizens and officials, given the incomplete science that serves as its foundation.

The underlying premise for his suggestion is the latest *draft* of an unpublished academic study that attempts to quantify the attitudes of Illinois public school teachers using 13-year-old data.

After analyzing statistics from a 1998 voluntary pension enhancement program, the study's conclusion is that Illinois teachers didn't really value their pensions that much because few teachers wanted to spend money in the present to enhance their future pensions. The study, however, does not address the adequacy of the pre-existing basic benefit. An adequate benefit also would serve to dampen the need for a member to purchase an enhanced pension. The results of the study more likely speak to the soundness of basic benefits for teachers as opposed to attitudes about their pensions.

Nonetheless, Mr. Firey extrapolates from the study's conclusion that public employees may be willing to reduce their future pensions to have more money in their pockets now. Teachers' Retirement System of the State of Illinois provided the raw data for the study under our state's Freedom of Information Act. We question how an economic analysis of enrollment in an optional pension program can serve as a true proxy for people's attitudes.

Sincerely,

Dick Ingram
Executive Director
Teachers' Retirement System of the State of Illinois