

Illinois Voters Support Protecting Public Employee Pensions

Raleigh, N.C. – Illinois voters are solidly against cutting public employee pensions, a new survey from Public Policy Polling finds. Voters oppose cutting pensions by a 58-31 margin. They also oppose cutting COLA, or pension cost of living adjustments, 60-31.

By a 50-34 margin, voters say that the pension issue is caused by wealthy people and corporations not paying their share rather than by the size of public employee pay and pensions.

Voters ascribe the pension debt to politicians skipping pension payments, rather than overly generous pension benefits. By a 64-27 margin voters say politicians skipping payments are to blame. This is true across the political spectrum: Democrats (71-19), Republicans (59-35) and independents (62-30) all agree that overly generous benefits are not the cause of the pension debt.

Voters also overwhelmingly say that public employees and politicians should work together to solve the pension issue rather than just simply cutting pensions by a 78-17 margin. This also holds true for Democrats (83-11), Republicans (71-27) and independents (78-18).

Poll respondents also say they would support a compromise whereby public employees pay an additional 2% out of their paychecks while corporate tax loopholes are closed to balance the pension debt by a 59-23 margin. They would also support refinancing the debt much like homeowners do with a mortgage by a 48-26 margin as a way of easing the crisis.

By a 60-32 margin, voters say they agree more with the idea that “a pension is a promise that can’t be broken, and the pension problem can be solved by guaranteeing payments and closing corporate tax loopholes” rather than “Illinois cannot afford the overly generous pensions of public employees and they should be cut.”

Finally, 44% of voters say they would be less likely to support a politician who voted to cut pensions, compared to just 29% who said they would be more likely.

PPP surveyed 500 Illinois voters between February 1st and 3rd. The margin of error for the survey is +/-4.4%. PPP surveys are conducted through automated telephone interviews.



Illinois Survey Results

Q1 Illinois state government has budget problems. Governor Quinn and other politicians say these problems are caused by public employee pay and pensions that should be cut. Public employees say they are middle-class workers like teachers, police, and caregivers, and the budget problems are caused mostly because rich people and big corporations don't pay their fair share. Which do you agree with more?

The budget problems are caused more by public employee pay and pensions..... 34%
They are caused more by rich people and big corporations not paying their share..... 50%
Not sure..... 16%

Q2 You may know that the pension funds for retired public employees like teachers, police, caregivers, and nurses are \$97 billion short of the amount they owe to current and future retirees. What do you think is more responsible for the pension debt: public employees with overly generous benefits or politicians who skipped pension payments?

Overly generous public employee benefits are more responsible for the pension debt..... 27%
Politicians skipping pension payments are..... 64%
Not sure..... 9%

Q3 There are different ideas about how to solve the pension problem. Governor Quinn and many other politicians support cutting pension benefits earned by retired public employees. Do you support or oppose cutting public employee pensions?

Support..... 31%
Oppose..... 58%
Not sure..... 11%

Q4 The unions that represent teachers, law enforcement officers, and other public employees and retirees have called for a pension summit with legislators. The unions say they want to work together to solve the pension problem fairly. Do you think politicians should work with representatives of public employees, or should they just cut the pensions?

Support politicians and public employees and working together to help solve the pension problems..... 78%
Politicians should just cut the pensions..... 17%
Not sure..... 4%

Q5 Public employees pay from 4% to 12% of every paycheck toward their pension. They say it's unfair to cut pensions they've earned and paid into. Instead, they have a plan to prevent politicians from skipping pension payments: public employees would pay an additional 2% from their own checks, while corporate tax loopholes would be closed. Do you support or oppose this plan?

Support..... 59%
Oppose..... 23%
Not sure..... 18%

Q6 The most significant change proposed by Governor Quinn and other politicians would reduce the pension cost of living adjustment, or COLA, that protects retired public employees from inflation, similar to the COLA earned by Social Security recipients. Politicians say the provision is not affordable. Retirees say they need it to keep up with rising costs. Do you think the cost of living adjustment should be cut or preserved?

It should be cut..... 31%
It should be preserved..... 60%
Don't know..... 9%





Q7 Illinois has one of the nation's strongest constitutional protections against cutting public employee pensions. Some say politicians should work with unions to develop a constitutional pension solution that everyone can support. Others say pensions should be cut and the courts should decide whether it's legal. Which do you agree with more?

- Politicians and public employees should work together to help solve the pension problems ..* 73%
- Pensions should be cut, and the courts should decide what is legal.....* 20%
- Not sure* 7%

Q8 Some experts have said the pension debt should be refinanced, like a homeowner might do with a mortgage. A refinancing plan might cost more now, but save billions over time, without cutting anyone's pension. Do you support or oppose refinancing the pension debt?

- Support* 48%
- Oppose* 26%
- Not sure* 26%

Q9 Having heard all of these questions, please tell me which statement is closer to your own view. Statement A says, "Illinois cannot afford the overly generous pensions of public employees, and they should be cut." Statement B says, "A pension is a promise that shouldn't be broken, and the pension problem can be solved by guaranteeing payments and closing corporate tax loopholes."

- Illinois cannot afford the overly generous pensions of public employees, and they should be cut* 32%
- A pension is a promise that shouldn't be broken, and the pension problem can be solved by guaranteeing payments and closing corporate tax loopholes* 60%
- Not sure* 8%

Q10 Would you be more likely or less likely to support a politician who voted to cut the pension earned by a retired teacher or other public employee, or would it not make a difference?

- More likely.....* 29%
- Less likely* 44%
- Wouldn't make a difference.....* 16%
- Not sure* 11%

Q11 If you are a woman, press 1. If a man, press 2.

- Woman* 51%
- Man.....* 49%

Q12 If you are a Democrat, press 1. If a Republican, press 2. If you are an independent or identify with another party, press 3.

- Democrat* 40%
- Republican.....* 26%
- Independent/Other.....* 34%

Q13 If you are Hispanic, press 1. If white, press 2. If African-American, press 3. If other, press 4.

- Hispanic.....* 8%
- White* 75%
- African-American* 11%
- Other.....* 6%

Q14 If you are 18 to 45 years old, press 1. If 46 to 65, press 2. If you are older than 65, press 3.

- 18 to 45.....* 32%
- 46 to 65.....* 49%
- Older than 65.....* 19%

