**Legislative Action Report**

**March 2024**

By Dick Simpson

Our new Legislative committee had its first briefing and committee meeting on February 16th to coordinate our legislative activities during 2024. Other volunteers are still welcome. The legislative session is underway, and the Governor has delivered his budget. In March and April, we will begin meeting with legislators as their schedule allows. The first several meetings have been set, and we will send delegations of from 2-5 members to meet with legislators **by Zoom.**

These will be primarily listening tours to hear their legislative priorities and to let them know our concerns. We will stress protection of Tier 1 pensions, better healthcare for members (many hospitals don’t accept TRAIL, and more may begin to turn it down), and improvements for Tier 2 to lower the time necessary to be vested and improve benefits.

The Governor’s budget was very helpful for our issues. He proposed significantly increased pension funding and to begin to address Tier 2 issues. Because this is an election year, we do not expect major negative pension legislation to pass but we must be ready if it is introduced.

The Governor also increased higher ed funding by $12 million but it is still 43% less than 20 years ago. MAP grants for low-income students increased by $10 million (but they cover only 27% of the cost of attending a public university).

Chris Keys and I have met by Zoom with the officers of the UIUC Executive Committee to coordinate our legislative activities and other joint actions we might take. We will meet with both UIUC and UIS in March to develop joint efforts.

Michele Thompson, I, and our SUAA lobbyist, Matt Maloney, attended the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA) meeting on “How the State Budget can be used to Address Historical Inequities and Structural Racism.” SUAA was a Sponsor of the event, and we got to talk briefly with State Representatives Carol Ammons, Kam Buckner, and Will Davis. More importantly, I was able to point out to the entire audience problems with our Tier 2 pensions and healthcare coverage.

One of the most important position papers from the CTBA meeting is that Tier 2 benefits do not meet the minimum Social Security standards. It is important that SUAA lobby for fairer treatment of Tier 2.

This issue will also let us more aggressively recruit Tier 2 members for SUAA.