**2024 Annual Report of the Legislative Committee**

 **By** **Dick Simpson****, Chair**

In January, we formed a new Legislative Committee. Since then, we have had nine meetings in some form with legislators in 2024. Some were at events; some were speakers at our SUAA forums; and five were Zoom meetings with them individually. At each, we expressed our concerns and legislative agenda. We stressed the protection of Tier 1 pensions, better healthcare for members (many hospitals don’t accept Aetna/TRAIL), and improvements for Tier 2 to improve benefits beyond Social Security standards (which the State does not currently meet). The healthcare issue and Tier 2 problems have most grabbed the attention of the legislators with whom we have met. We have stressed our advocacy for these issues in communications to SUAA members and potential members as well as at our annual meeting and fall forum in order to recruit new SUAA members.

Pension funding was increased in this year’s State budget, and no new legislation affecting SURS pensions passed beyond the annual funding although there were substantive hearings. There were no new amendments introduced in the Fall veto session. The governor’s new budget will be introduced in the Spring legislative session, and any Tier 2 improvement legislation will be reintroduced soon afterwards.

We plan for our lobbying efforts next year to be more focused on key legislators in the Chicago region where most SUAA-UIC members live. Chris Welch and Don Harmon will be two of the key legislators with whom to meet in either December or January after the November 5 election and the veto override session.

At the national level, in a resounding vote of 327 to 75, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 82, "The Social Security Fairness Act," which would repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO). A bill rarely receives such strong bi-partisan support, but this was one of those rare times. Of the 17 members of the Illinois Congressional delegation, only two representatives, Mary Miller and Darin LaHood, voted against the bill.

WEP and GPO have long been a major concern for many of our members, and we are one step closer to seeing this important legislation pass. Now that the bill has passed the House, it will move on to the U.S. Senate during the lame-duck session, where, in more good news, the Senate version of the Social Security Fairness Act has 62 co-sponsors. If all Senate co-sponsors were to vote to "invoke cloture," which requires a 60-vote threshold, it would end all debate on the bill, and the bill would go straight to a vote for final passage. Should the bill pass the Senate, it would then go to President Biden to sign into law or veto it. It is important to contact our two Illinois Senators to thank them for signing onto the bill.

 SUAA Executive Director Bryan Soady has created a video entitled [The Importance of SUAA and Why You Should Join](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkEmc9u6Zmo), and we have the video from our fall forum. We will use clips from these videos in emails to encourage current UIC employees to join SUAA-UIC. We continue to lose SUAA members (despite some joining at the fall forum), and we need more members - especially Tier 2 members - to lobby successfully in 2025.

 We have met frequently with SUAA staff to coordinate our efforts and also with leaders from the SUAA chapters at UIUC and UIS. Our lobbying methods are being used as a template for other SUAA chapters in the State.

 I have been appointed to the State legislative committee, which is being reconstituted to guide the lobbying efforts of the staff and chapters in 2025. So SUAA-UIC continues to play an important role in this process.