

Retirement without Adequate and Affordable Health Care Is No Retirement at All

This article has been compiled from information provided by STRS.

Representative Scott Oelslager (House District 51, R-North Canton) introduced House Bill (H.B.) 315 on September 18, 2007, which contains the proposal for creating an ongoing, dedicated revenue stream for the STRS Ohio Health Care Program. Based on available data, the employee and employer contributions contained in H.B. 315 should enable STRS Ohio to keep pace with escalating costs to ensure that affordable health care coverage continues for thousands of **current and future** retired Ohio public educators well into the future.

Over the past several years, retired teachers have had to pay a higher portion of their health care expenses. Current projections show that the STRS Health Care Fund will run out of money in 2021. HB 315 provides long-term solvency for the STRS Health Care Fund by creating a way for employees and their employers to pre-fund retiree health care benefits. The bill would increase employee contributions by 2.5% of their salary and the employer contribution by 2.5% of payroll. These increases would be phased in over a five-year period in 0.5% increments and could **only** be used to provide health care benefits.

Current law does not allow any portion of the employee contribution to

go towards health care. Hopefully the majority of active teachers would rather pay a manageable amount of money while working than be saddled with the entire cost of health care coverage in retirement.

The bill currently has fourteen bi-partisan House sponsors. The bill has the majority support of Ohio's public educators, was unanimously approved by the delegates attending last spring's OEA Representative Assembly, and is endorsed by the Health Care Advocates for STRS, a coalition of management, professional, and retiree organizations representing Ohio's public K-12 and higher education teachers.

Securing post-retirement health care through the passage of H.B. 315 will depend on your support. With some school board and management interest groups lobbying against this bill, legislators will need to hear from the tens of thousands of active and retired educators who have much to lose if the legislation is not enacted. Failure to pass H.B. 315 will not only jeopardize future health care benefits for those who have dedicated their lives to serving Ohio's public school children, but will also cost districts substantial sums of money as more and more educators delay

retirement in order to maintain affordable health insurance.

You can help pass this important bill by contacting your representative seeking his or her support for H.B. 315. Contacting your representative is easy and will only take a few moments of your time. Go to the OEA Web site – www.oea.org and click on the picture labeled “**Support STRS Health Care.**” This will link you to a few simple steps to send an email of your support for H.B. 315 to provide affordable health care for current and future retirees of STRS.

This proposal has benefits for employers. Without access to affordable health care, teachers will be forced to work longer and longer. An aging teacher workforce will drive up salaries and health care costs for school districts.

House Bill 315 is a viable approach to an important public policy issue. It recognizes the cost of providing retiree health benefits and funds the liability rather than ignoring the problem. Opponents of the bill have offered no viable solution. It makes sense to secure the STRS Health Care Program for the future rather than risk adding to the ranks of uninsured Ohioans! (See “Lobby at Home Day” on p. 3)

Important Information Regarding Web Sites *MySpace and Facebook*

MySpace and Facebook present a unique set of problems for education employees. Look for an in-depth article on the subject in an upcoming issue of **Ohio Schools**. In the meantime here are a few suggestions that you can share with your colleagues.

The OEA strongly encourages members to avoid MySpace and Facebook. OEA advises members not to join, and for existing users to complete the steps involved in removing their profiles. While this advice may seem extreme, the dangers of participating in these two sites outweigh the benefits.

- Even without teachers'/school employees' voluntary participation, students can create “imposter” pages that may damage their careers.
- MySpace and Facebook pages can be used as evidence in discipline proceedings by school districts and the Office of Professional Conduct at the Ohio Department of Education. These proceedings potentially affect not only a teacher's current job but his/her teaching license.
- Regardless of the validity, a belief exists that only predators and teenagers are on MySpace and Facebook. The fact that a student can attempt to contact an OEA member who has a profile on these sites lends itself to the possible interpretation of an improper relationship. Because of the high standards placed on school employees and the risk of job and career loss, the OEA recommends avoiding even the appearance of impropriety.

For more information contact your OEA Labor Relations Consultant, and read your *Ohio Schools* to stay informed.