

Under Ohio law, public pensions must balance their income and expenditures so that they can pay current liabilities for pension benefits within a 30-year period. Hutras calls it the equivalent of paying off a mortgage.

For example, the State Teachers Retirement System reported on July 1, 2008, that this would take 41.2 years, well over the required length of time. Its estimate on July 1 of this year was "infinity."

Changes the pension funds could recommend to the Ohio Retirement Study Council include:

- Increase employee and employer contributions.
- Increase the minimum retirement age.
- Increase the number of years used to calculate the final average salary from three to five.
- Eliminate, reduce or delay annual cost-of-living adjustments.
- Eliminate the lump-sum death benefit.

Spreading out the losses between contributors and beneficiaries is the fairest thing to do, said Andrew Karolyi, a former professor at Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business, now at Cornell University.

"It makes everyone mad, but not as mad as if one of the groups was singled out and had to take the brunt of it," he said.

The problem with the pension funds' 30-year liability is connected to their total assets, which dropped sharply because of major declines in the stock market.

The Dow Jones industrial average plunged 33.8 percent in 2008 and even further during the first few months of this year before the recovery began.

The State Teachers Retirement System's assets were \$52.7 billion on June 30, the end of its fiscal year -- a 31.4 percent drop from the

\$76.8 billion total at the end of its fiscal year 2007.

"Our board is looking at plans to strengthen the plan," said spokeswoman Laura Ecklar. "But there are only certain levers you can look at: investment returns, contributions, then the pension-plan design."

In a recent letter to members, the pension system said it is considering raising the contribution of current teachers from 10 percent to 14 percent and instituting a minimum retirement age of 60.

The State Teachers Retirement Board will hold a special meeting this morning to discuss its "long-term fiduciary and financial contingency planning."

Another way to measure the strength of a pension fund is its funded ratio, which are assets relative to actuarial liabilities.

The State Teachers Retirement System's funded ratio dropped to 57.9 percent on July 1, down from 79.1 percent a year earlier.

"I would start to worry when it gets down into the 70s and 60s," Karolyi said.

The rising cost of health care is another problem for the systems, Hutras said.

"They're all trying to sustain a post-retirement health-care component and without that, they wouldn't be in the situation they are in now," he said, calling this the "elephant in the room" nobody wants to talk about.

Any contribution or benefit changes recommended by the five pension funds' boards must be approved by the legislature, Hutras said.

"The only thing they have the authority to do themselves is change the eligibility for health care" or their premiums, he said.

In recent weeks, a surging stock market has helped the funds regain some losses.

The Highway Patrol Retirement System's assets dropped 31 percent in 2008 to \$576 million, but were up by 8.5 percent to \$625 million on July 1.

This is still well below the fund's \$834 million total at the end of 2007.

"Yes, there is some concern," said Richard Curtis, executive director of the Highway Patrol Retirement System. "We had a significantly negative year in 2008, as every other public pension fund in the country did."

He called it a once-in-a-lifetime event that will take years to overcome.

"Our system is designed to operate in perpetuity at an 8 percent return," he said, "and when you have a negative year like we had, you can't estimate how long it will take to recover."

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Some released Wash. prisoners getting free rent

The Associated Press

Some felons who have earned early release from prison are getting a few months of subsidized rent from Washington taxpayers, a new cost-cutting move expected to save the state \$1.5 million by reducing the prison population.

The voucher program was approved earlier this year by the state Legislature, which needed to fix a roughly \$9 billion state budget deficit. Before the program was in place, some inmates who had earned early release still couldn't be let out of prison because they had no place to live.

By paying rent directly to an early-release felon's landlord, the state avoids the higher costs of keeping those convicts behind bars. Inmates released under the voucher program are eligible for rent subsidies of up to \$500 a month for three months - thousands of dollars less than the state would spend caring for them behind bars.

The Department of Corrections is expected to spend about \$955,000 on rent vouchers for roughly 700 offenders through mid-2011, for an overall savings of about \$1.5 million over the program's first two years.

At present, rental aid is available only for inmates who have earned early release because of time served and good behavior, but don't have a home or enough money to rent one.

Eligible early-release inmates also must have a structured plan for supervision, and treatment and must be monitored with GPS ankle bracelets for a period of time.

As of last week, the Department of Corrections had approved 31 inmates for rental assistance, The Herald newspaper of Everett reported Monday.

That included five inmates living in King, Pierce and Spokane counties. A convicted sex offender expected to move into an Everett apartment in less than two weeks would be the first inmate released to Snohomish County under the voucher plan, The Herald reported.

Moving out inmates who are in prison even though they're eligible for early release could eventually save the state millions of dollars.

In 2008, the Corrections Department held 1,258 offenders past their earned early release date. Had those inmates all been released when eligible, the state could have saved up to \$13.5 million, The Herald reported.

Despite the state's budget troubles, state corrections officials said they are not under pressure to quickly reach full capacity in the rental voucher program.

"We're ramping up slowly enough so we can support (inmates') release plan in ways that minimize their risk to the community and save money," said Anmarie Aylward, administrator of the department's offender treatment and re-entry programs.

But the program has some opponents, including state Rep. Kirk Pearson, R-Monroe, the ranking Republican on the House public safety committee.

"I am watching this carefully," Pearson told The Herald. "I didn't support it and if it is not going the way it should be, I'm going to try to end it."

LA firefighters killed trying to save inmate crew

By CHRISTINA HOAG and JACOB ADELMAN Associated Press Writers

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LOS ANGELES—As the roaring wall of flame raged through the Angeles National Forest, firefighters Ted Hall and Arnie Quinones worked feverishly to protect their fire-crew camp, made up mostly of prison inmates.

But all too suddenly, the fire invaded the campsite. Hall and Quinones shepherded 55 inmates and several corrections and fire personnel into a cinderblock dining hall to shelter them from the blaze.

The fire burned through the camp, leaving it in ruins. The dining hall provided adequate shelter for now, but Hall and Quinones knew they had to get everyone to safety. So they jumped in an engine truck and left to search for an escape route down Mount Gleason.

It proved a fatal move.

Smoke blanketed a winding road that is perilous in the best of conditions. The truck careened off the blacktop, tumbling as it plunged 800 feet down the steep mountainside. The vehicle crashed upside down, killing the two men.

The fire they had tried to outrun quickly caught up to them and left the truck a scorched hulk—a reminder that death lives in the shadows of firefighting.

Quinones, 35, leaves behind a pregnant wife who is due to give birth to the couple's first child in the next few weeks. Hall, 47, had a wife and two adult sons.

The deaths, the second and third of firefighters in the line of duty in California this year, have shaken the ranks of men and women battling the 105,000-acre fire. Morale is dim and the mood somber.

"It hits home," said Los Angeles Fire Capt. Sam Padilla. "This morning my daughter hugged me a little tighter than usual."

The department is sending a crisis management team to the camps that worked closely with Hall and Quinones in the Air and Wildland Division, and will hold a memorial service later this week at the firefighters' staging camp.

"They were selfless," said Terry Thornton, spokeswoman for the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. "They put others' safety ahead of their own."

Hall was a captain with 26 years in the Los Angeles County fire department, while Quinones, a specialist, had eight years of service. They worked together supervising a state Department of Corrections fire crew, which later was rescued from the fire.

Neighbors and colleagues described both men as devoted to their families and their jobs.

Hall lived with his wife Katherine in Oak Hills, a rural area of San Bernardino County where homes sit on 2.5-acre lots. His sons—Randall, 21, and Steven, 20—and his parents live nearby, neighbors said.

"Ted was very family-oriented," said next-door neighbor Sandy Nuckolls. "He loved going motorcycle riding with his boys."

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The Mercury News

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Quinones lived in Palmdale with his pregnant wife Loressa.

Los Angeles County firefighter Karen Zakowitz, 46, of Fontana, recalled Quinones as a "gung ho and happy person" who was called "Q."

"I would have taken his place in a heartbeat," she said, choking back tears. "The wildland firefighting family is special, even if you don't like each other, you hang together and we're grieving together. You can feel it all across the camp."

The deaths also hit firefighters who have come from around the state to pitch in.

Fremont Fire Capt. Rick Cory, 41, said he immediately called home to let his family know he was safe. "It was pretty shocking," he said. "But it's part of the job. Bad things happen even if you do everything right."

Wildfires pose particular challenges for firefighters because of the rugged terrain and narrow access roads. Firefighters often have limited access to oxygen tanks, and toil in close proximity to flames that are notoriously unpredictable

But that feeling of being on the edge was one reason firefighters said they loved their jobs. "Pretty much anyone who fights fires likes the excitement of it, the adrenaline rush, the atmosphere of the unknown," said U.S. Forest Service firefighter Angie Bishop, 29, of Mendocino County. "It is really scary, but you don't really process that."

Associated Press Writer Raquel Dillon contributed to this report.

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DNA law misses 50,000 felons released in Illinois

August 31, 2009 8:03 PM | [No Comments](#)

An estimated 50,000 felons have been released from Illinois prisons or county probation without submitting DNA samples as required by law, leaving a gaping hole in the 7-year-old program designed to link known criminals to unsolved crimes.

The Illinois Department of Corrections released nearly 10,000 felons without gathering their DNA since the law was enacted. And Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan's office estimates that county probation departments did not secure samples from 40,000 additional felons, mostly in Cook County, due to delays in implementing the law.

The missing DNA samples are of major concern to law-enforcement officials, lawmakers and victims advocates, who say Illinois has been robbed of the opportunity to solve crimes, remove violent offenders from the street and exonerate the wrongfully convicted.

The 2007 charges against Robert Rejda from Oakbrook Terrace illustrate how valuable the samples can be. DNA gathered from Rejda after a felony DUI arrest linked him to the Christmas rape and murder of his childhood friend and to a sexual assault of an Aurora woman, equipping police with the evidence needed for a swift arrest. He later committed suicide in jail.

Exactly how many people have not submitted samples as required by law is unknown. No government entity has tracked whether DNA is being gathered from all felons covered by the 2002 law.

Last week, Madigan's office sent surveys to all county probation offices and state's attorneys in Illinois, asking when they began complying with the 2002 law and to what extent.

The office ultimately wants to develop ways to capture missing samples -- a goal supported by DuPage County State's Atty. Joseph Birkett, who was among those who pushed for collecting DNA from felons.

"Serial murderers and rapists have probably remained on the loose, and families have continued to suffer," Birkett said. "We need to find a way to get that DNA."

Under the law, every felon sentenced on or after Aug. 22, 2002, must provide a DNA sample, whether they are under the supervision of the Department of Corrections or a county jail or probation.

DNA profiles of convicted offenders are stored in state and national databases, which include DNA evidence collected from homicides, sexual assaults and other cases. The database can produce "hits" that reveal the identities of suspects or associations between cases.

But several factors made gathering DNA samples from felons difficult, officials said.

At first, the Illinois State Police, which administers the state's DNA database, didn't have sufficient kits, said Lt. Scott Compton, state police spokesman.

Even when the kits were made available, county probation offices struggled because samples were to be taken by drawing blood, and they lacked medical staff to do that. It wasn't until 2004, when the state police switched to another means of gathering DNA, by which people swab the inside of a felon's mouth, that probation officers could begin performing the task.

The Department of Corrections released 9,098 inmates without securing their DNA samples, said Januari Smith, department spokeswoman.

Some county probation offices said it took at least a year after the law went into effect for them to start gathering samples, although none could say how many felons did not provide DNA during that time.

"We don't know who slipped through the cracks," said Jeff Jefko, deputy director of Kane County court services.

Cara Smith, Madigan's deputy chief of staff, said she and Cook County officials have estimated tens of thousands of felons in the county did not provide DNA samples as required,

Sally Daly, a spokeswoman for Cook County State's Atty. Anita Alvarez, said her office didn't track the gathering of DNA samples.

The Cook County probation office didn't respond to questions from the Tribune.

Despite the glitches, Illinois has been able to collect and store DNA samples from more than 300,000 offenders, and the DNA database has yielded around 9,000 hits of some kind, state police said.

The gruesome slayings of five women in a Lane Bryant store in Tinley Park last year are among the cases that raise speculation about which DNA profiles are missing. Evidence gathered from the scene turned up no hits when submitted to the national DNA database -- even though experts say it would be surprising if the offender had not committed a previous felony.

"When you look at terrible crimes that were committed where investigations have not produced a defendant, like with the Lane Bryant case, you have to wonder if the offenders were among the felons whose DNA was not gathered?" Cara Smith said.



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