



December 16, 2013

Dear Reader,

In my service as a state representative in Illinois, there will be times when my judgment, decisions, and actions merit an explanation.

Recently, the Illinois House and Senate narrowly passed a pension reform bill with the hope of filling the current liability of the state of about \$100 billion for state-funded pension plans for teachers, police, nurses, child protective workers, state university employees, and other retired and current state workers. This pension system desperately needs to be funded to protect the investments made by current and future retirees. We should recognize the hard work of my colleagues in the General Assembly and all stakeholders for dealing with the pension issue, showing that the General Assembly can come together to work on tough issues. The fact that this new law narrowly passed the General Assembly and immediately faces legal challenges reflects just how difficult this decision was. Even though this new law seems to be “the fix”, there is no one single bill that would completely reform the pension systems.

I understand the significance of our pension and financial crisis. That's why, in 2010, I supported a constitutional change to the state's pension system and helped pass a two-tier pension system for state employees. Also in 2010, I introduced and passed legislation to create a State Financial Crisis Task Force within the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to work with talented citizen-leaders to identify ways to cut costs and obtain more revenue for the state of Illinois. This year, in 2013, I introduced legislation which was passed and became law as the Illinois Small Business and Workforce Development Task Force Act ([http://www.lashawnkford.com/download/press-release/Labor%20Day%202013%20Letter\(2\).pdf](http://www.lashawnkford.com/download/press-release/Labor%20Day%202013%20Letter(2).pdf)). Christopher Kennedy, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, has been called to be the Chairman of the Task Force, which will help identify issues of importance to small businesses that may be addressed by the 98th General Assembly and future General Assemblies that may be turned into action to improve small businesses and identify ways to put people to work in Illinois. I believe we need to do more to grow our state's economy, which will generate revenue so the state will be able to make the pension payments that are needed.

Furthermore, we need to examine how our state money is spent. What cuts can be made? In the 2013 budget, more than \$125 million is allocated to Juvenile Justice, and almost \$1.2 billion to the Department of Corrections. What can we do as a society to decrease the numbers of youth and adults who are so expensively incarcerated? I have worked hard since I arrived in the General Assembly in 2007 to prevent persons from ever being involved with the criminal justice system, and I have also worked hard to increase opportunities for ex-offenders to find jobs and contribute to our society, preventing their return to prison.

In listening to my constituents so I can best represent them, I heard a strong message about the difficulties of struggling families trying to make ends meet on one retirement income and the unfairness of the current

pension plan. I received information through an informal poll of more than 500 people initiated by our office (<http://www.lashawnkford.com/download/press-release/FORDpr%202013-09-26%20Ford%20&%20Pensions%20Poll.pdf>), and through the hundreds of emails and phone calls we received. The overwhelming response was against the current pension plan. Families continue to feel bullied by the very government that is designed to usher in liberty and a government that should be by the people and for the people.

Employees and retirees paid into a system that, in essence, was used as a source of revenue for projects for the rest of us. They did nothing wrong - it is not fair, and I believe it may be against Illinois' constitution, to decrease their benefits that they need and were relying on. Many might think that the cost of living adjustment of 3%/year is too much, but those who receive social security benefits have also received, on average, a cost of living increase in their benefits of 2.8%/year over the last 30 years. These state employees are generally not eligible for social security benefits, but must rely on their state pension.

As the Chairman of the Illinois House Restorative Justice Committee and a believer of justice and fairness for everyone, I could not, in good faith, support this current pension reform bill which I felt was unjust and would diminish the quality of life for too many Illinois families. It's important to recognize the dangers of not voting for the current pension bill, but it's also important to recognize the dangers of voting for the pension bill. Illinois families will have their quality of life diminished, and that not only hurts each family, but the state as well.

To fund the pensions, we must do everything we can in Springfield to increase revenue for the state by closing corporate loopholes, ending corporate welfare to big businesses, creating a fair taxing system, and ending wasteful spending on an unfair criminal justice system. I am for a fair state, where we have a fair taxing system so that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. A fair tax code, stronger businesses, new businesses, more jobs, and a cut in wasteful spending are the keys to a stronger state. It always seems easier to bail out big corporations with special tax codes and incentives at the expense of Illinois' working poor and middle class families.

I will work with Chris Kennedy and the Task Force to create legislation for the General Assembly to consider so that we can grow revenue by strengthening and growing businesses in Illinois. I will continue to work with members of the General Assembly to help to fairly fund the state's priorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative – Eighth District