

Prenzler: County Board should have voted on pension system three years ago

September 8 2016 9:58 AM



EDWARDSVILLE — Madison County Board members are expected to vote this month to end their participation in the pension system, but **Treasurer Kurt Prenzler** said the practice should have ended three years ago.

“The county board chairman is asking board members to opt out of the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund because of a new law,” Prenzler said. “The chairman says it will save taxpayers’ money. But he’s not telling the whole story.”

IMRF conducted an “employer audit report” in December 2013. Pension officials stated that they were “unable to determine that the above mentioned elected officials (county board members) met county’s hourly standard requirement of 600 hours.”

The findings required the county do one of three things: have (county board members) complete and sign a document “certification by elected officials of hours required”; send documentation that board members worked 600 hours; or withdraw the county board from IMRF.

A Freedom of Information Act request filed with IMRF on Aug. 24 provided the county’s response. County Administrator Joe Parente answered “the elected officials continue to meet the hourly standard.”

There were no certification forms signed by county board members submitted to IMRF, only an attached document claiming all board members worked the exact same annual hours — 788.

“I couldn’t believe what I saw after getting the FOIA and seeing the county’s response,” Prenzler said. “It looks like the chairman’s office just ‘made it up’ to save pensions for part-time elected officials.”

According to IMRF, the number of hours elected officials spend at board and committee meetings count as official time, however other activities may not.

Earlier this year during an audit of the McHenry County Board, IMRF Executive Director Louis Kosiba said attending community events, election-related duties and campaigning are not eligible work hours. He said providing false information in order to receive a benefit is a felony, which is why the IMRF encourages people to document their hours and understand IMRF rules.

Madison County Board members were never required to log their time working on county-related business. In his response to IMRF, Parente claimed each board member attended 300 hours in official meetings, 240 hours for constituent services, 96 hours on financial and operations oversight, 72 hours on taxing district communication and 80 hours for other duties.

Prenzler said the new law, which became effective the day the governor signed it on Aug. 26, requires county board members to keep detailed time sheets of when they work.

Even before the change in the law, all part-time elected officials (county, township, municipal, etc.) who participated in IMRF were required to work a minimum of 600 hours.

“The new law simply puts teeth in the hourly requirement and makes part-time county board members prove what they work,” Prenzler said.