RPEA Cares About Retirees: State Budget Recap and Critical Legislation

by Dev Berger

This June, state leaders and Governor Newsom were confronted with a substantial shortfall while reaching a deal on the 2024/2025 state budget. Negotiations resulted in a mixed bag for California families. Although many essential programs were protected, continued resistance to significantly raising revenues and various financial maneuvers could hinder progress in future years helping all Californians thrive.

What is troublesome about the budget is how it relies on borrowing from future budgets and committing a higher percentage of future revenue growth to schools while only temporarily increasing revenues. If revenue conditions don't improve, these efforts could compromise sustainability of core programs and stall much-needed investments in the coming years.

RPEA's new president and board members want your voice heard in the California Legislature, at CalPERS, and across the state, and heard loudly and clearly.

So what actions can state leaders make next year and down the road for an equitable California? Well, state leaders will need to set funding and policy priorities helping all Californians share in the wealth they helped create. They also need to make certain state tax dollars are invested in areas of greatest need. Doing that requires bold approaches for public services and systems. Examples pointed out by the California Budget and Policy Center include:

- Raise revenues to boost tax fairness and invest in our communities;
- Provide ongoing, at-scale resources to increase affordable housing and solve homelessness;
- Close more state prisons to free up resources for critical services.

What many of us find disturbing about the budget is the difficulty seeing how the budget specifically helped older adults. Sure, you can find the California Department of Aging's budget, but knowing what specific improvements were done compared to the prior Governor's budget, that's a whole other matter. That isn't to say, for example, that the budget didn't address housing needs to a degree of low-income adults, or didn't address in-home-support issues that assist disabled adults. But if you want the big picture of improvements showing changes and innovations, that proves difficult in relationship to older adult services and programs. It isn't just an issue of transparency either or bad reporting, it is a sign that older adults are not getting the attention they deserve in actual programs and services being developed and funded.

This has been a disturbing state-budgetary trend for some time now and saying California has kept pace with its growing older-adult population is highly questionable. Just ask county and service providers of older adult services and they will fill you in on the glaring shortages. By 2030, it's projected that one in four Californians will be an older adult. If we want to live well, older adults need to demand California takes actions ensuring they receive the support needed through appropriate state budgets.

RPEA Cares About Retirees: State Budget Recap (Cont.)

It's worth asking questions about the diminishing attention by the state budget for older adults, who have their job cut out getting government to listen and care about retirement, pensions, healthcare, housing, transportation, and food insecurity needs. Yes, these impact everyone when you get down to it, but when it comes to the specific needs of older adults, there are crying needs.

Fortunately RPEA cares about retirees and older adult issues as shown by its legislative efforts. Here's a summary of this session's legislation and RPEA's efforts pertaining to them:

SB 1260 (Niello) – RPEA Sponsored bill - Would have created an Office of Inspector General at CalPERS to investigate malfeasance at CalPERS. Assembly Member Niello agreed to author the bill for RPEA, however, the bill garnered significant opposition from public sector labor groups and there was some question as to the constitutionality of the bill as it may have run afoul of Proposition 162. As a result, the bill did not move forward.

RPEA is not deterred and will continue striving for transparency and accountability for retirees and beneficiaries that receive a CalPERS pension.

AB 1246 (Ngueyn) – RPEA Co-sponsored bill - Public Employees' Retirement System - divorce after retirement beneficiary - It was news to many that if a CalPERS member divorces after retirement, they are unable, under current law, to add a beneficiary to their retirement if they subsequently remarry. AB 1246 will remedy that oversight. The bill was signed by the Governor.

AB 2207 (Reyes) – Supported by RPEA - State board and commissions: representation of older adults - Directs the membership of various advisory groups and bodies to include the Executive Director of the California Commission on Aging (Commission), or others who serve or advocate on behalf of older adults. The boards and commissions that deal with issues pertaining to older adults should be representative of the constituents they serve. This bill would require just that. The bill was signed by the Governor.

AB 1410 (Ta) – Supported by RPEA - Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman - advisory council - Would require the Department of Aging to increase the 11-member advisory council that advises the State Long-Term Care Ombudsperson Program to 13-members. The bill died in the Assembly.

AB 2075 (Alverez) – Supported by RPEA - Resident Access Protection Act - Would require each resident of a long-term care facility, as defined, to have the right to in-person, onsite access to visitors and health care and social services providers during any public health emergency in which visitation rights of residents are curtailed by a state or local order. The bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2200 (Kalra) – Opposed by RPEA - Guaranteed Health Care for All - Establishes the policy framework for the California Guaranteed Health Care for All program, or CalCare, a health care service plan, to provide comprehensive, universal, single-payer health care coverage and a health care cost control system for all residents of the state. RPEA opposed the bill because it contemplated consolidating Medi-Cal, Medicare, private insurance and the Covered California exchange into a single health insurance product (CalCare) provided by the state — without the constitutional protections that are essential to ensuring that an adequate, guaranteed supply of resources will be allocated to ensure its viability. As a result, it would have eliminated CalPERS health care for public employees and retirees. The bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 37 (Caballero) – Supported by RPEA - Senior housing tax credit - Establishes the Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities Housing Stability Program (OAADHS), administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), to provide housing subsidies to older adults and adults with disabilities who either are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. The bill was vetoed by the Governor.

SJR 1 (Cortese) – Support by RPEA - Social Security Act - repeal of benefit reductions - Joint resolution petitions the United States Congress to enact, and the President of the United States to sign, legislation to repeal the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision from the Social Security Act and instructs the Secretary of the Senate to transmit copies of this resolution to members of Congress. The resolution passed.

RPEA's new president and board members want your voice heard in the California Legislature, at CalPERS, and across the state, and heard loudly and clearly. None of us can sit back and wait for someone else to act. It definitely takes a village. RPEA will work hard but it needs your help.