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President's Message

Recent efforts of the Illinois Judges Association on behalf of its members...

With a letter of support in hand from the Supreme Court of Illinois for the concept of full state funding, on Wednesday, March 8th, Judges Wexstten, Schuering, Spears and Stuart met for a noon meeting in Springfield with representatives of the Illinois State Bar Association and The Chicago Bar Association, including ISBA Executive Director Robert Craghead, CBA Executive Director Terry Murphy, ISBA legislative liaison Jim Covington, CBA lobbyist, Larry Sufferdin and ISBA lobbyist, Dan Houlihan to discuss a strategy. While this effort will take many years, these partners are critical to its success and have committed their resources.

Immediately following that meeting, the same officers met with representatives of the state pension systems, including the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the Illinois Education Association, AFSME Council 31 and the State Employees International Union, along with Tim Blair from the state retirement system. This meeting focused on strategies to secure the state pension systems through appropriate and adequate funding and to avoid efforts such as the recent "pension holidays" taken in this and the next fiscal year. I feel more confident that because of these efforts we will see an increase in the funding of our pension systems and the unlikelihood of further such "holidays".

Lastly, I then traveled to Chicago to testify, along with First Vice President Jesse Reyes, before the Compensation Review Board on Thursday, March 9th. My testimony included a sincere thank you to this board for its efforts and hard work in raising our compensation levels, including the COLA. While we did not request an across the board salary increase, we did request that the board give attention to the growing disparity between the salaries of Circuit and Associate Judges which now approaches nearly \$11,000. (In their report, the

Compensation Review Board in fact included an 11-0 recommendation that the salary for Associate Judges in Illinois be set at 95% of the salary of the Circuit Court Judges.) Further, we pointed out that while the COLA has been an important component of our salary, the starting salary for 25 year old first year lawyers in Cook County has now reached \$135,000 and on the east and west coasts, that salary level is \$145,000. As such, even with the COLA, judicial salaries are barely above those levels.

My last point dealt with judicial pensions which I characterized as a constitutionally protected component of our salary, pointing out that the pension holiday threatens that benefit. Our testimony included a statement that government must lead the effort to protect pensions of its workers and not follow the private sector in its efforts to reduce these benefits. The final request included consideration for the state of Illinois to contribute to our pension as is done in most other states.

This testimony was supported by following testimony from Judge Jesse Reyes and Michael B. Hyman, President of The Chicago Bar Association.

After a request from Justice Warren Wolfson, 37 judges from the Illinois Judges Association's Board of Directors and Task Force were trained as judicial intervenors for the Lawyers Assistance Program. We are pleased with the number of judges who volunteered for this very important program.

The IJA is working with the ISBA on a jury service brochure. When it is completed, it will be placed on our website.

I know that those of you who are members understand and appreciate these efforts. But, I would respectfully ask that you inform our colleagues who are not members that this organization, the Illinois Judges Association, is their only strong voice on these issues.