

Hello, my name is Janell Woodward and I am a state worker and AFSCME Local 4041 member. I would like to take the opportunity to urge the Interim Finance Committee to approve the request from the PEBP board to restore all cuts to benefits for state employees. I also urge this committee to approve repayment of furlough days as soon as possible. There is no reason to wait on repaying furlough days to state employees.

The American Rescue Plan was created by the federal government solely to restore budget shortfalls to state and local governments caused by the covid pandemic and the federal guidance for these funds expressly state this. It is not for anyone's wish list of things to spend funds on.

After being forced to take a cut in pay with the furloughs, we then received the drastic cuts to the PEBP and PERS programs. While we realize costs go up, this was just wrong. The cuts to healthcare benefits shifted many costs to state employee while also cutting coverage. This has already created a hardship financially just since July 1 when the new plans started. This committee needs to realize the tremendous financial hardship these actions have caused. Copays have gone through the roof as well as added deductibles, lack of needed coverage, and co-insurance.

Employees should be a priority because if they are not supported, they cannot do a sufficient job of supporting our communities, of which we are all a part as both state workers AND constituents.

For me personally, and many of my fellow state workers, cancer is a real thing. These cuts have made obtaining sufficient continued care very difficult. Serious health issues for other employees are equally difficult. And yet here we remain with pay cuts and drastic cuts to our healthcare benefits.

As everyone is aware, state employees work for much lower wages than our city and county counterparts, but the tradeoff is supposed to be the benefits that we get. State employees are happy to work for less because they love their jobs, but to lose benefits for no good reason is just showing the state's lack of appreciation for the work that state employees do.

I would ask each of you to please think seriously about reinstating employee benefits via the American Rescue Plan funds. Additionally, please repay the 6 furlough days as soon as possible. We are in a unique situation to be able to provide this to employees. This would go a long way to help all state employees and is the Right thing to do.

Thank you.