

IOWA POLICE JOURNAL

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE IOWA STATE POLICE ASSOCIATION



BOARD SPOTLIGHT

By Dave McFarland, Second Vice-President



Well, I hope by the time you're reading this the snow is gone and spring is here, but as the last couple weeks have shown us: living in Iowa, anything is possible. I recently had the opportunity and privilege of representing the Iowa State Police Association (ISPA) at the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO) Pension and Benefits Seminar in Orlando. (Talk about a temperature shock — going from 80 degrees and sunny in Florida, then returning to Iowa's wind, snow and 30-degree weather.)

During the conference, NAPO had several speakers talk about the trends and the status of pensions across the United States. One of the speakers talked about the increasing number of people failing to plan for retirement.

A recent survey found 45 percent of all people have **zero dollars** saved for retirement. He said more families are buying lottery tickets than investing for retirement. He went on to say because employees can't afford to retire, they are having to work longer. This costs everyone — taxpayers, employers and employees — more money. In general, older employees make more money, have more time off and have higher health care costs.

I personally don't know many officers that want to be working into their 60s. As you get older, you realize what it means when someone says, "Chasing bad guys is a young man's game." Fortunately, most law enforcement officers in Iowa are covered by either Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System (IPERS) or 411 pension systems, and with a little planning, they should be able to retire at age 55 or younger.

Robert Wilson, assistant executive director of the Missouri Local Government Employee Retirement System (LAGERS) spoke at the conference. LAGERS is a defined benefit pension system, and the largest retirement system in Missouri that serves local governments. Wilson said LAGERS is considered a model pension system in Missouri, and more local governments are choosing to join LAGERS each year. I know some may find that hard to believe — especially when across the nation there has been a push to go from defined benefit pensions to defined contribution pensions.

Wilson talked about resisting the urge to get mad or defensive when someone questions why public employees get "such a good pension." He said instead to the opportunity to education them on the purpose of public employee pensions. The purpose of a good public employee pension system should be to make the community a better place. A well-run public pension

should be a tool to attract quality employees and provide incentive for them to stay. We should want our public employees to feel vested in the job they do and become a part of the community they serve. We don't want them looking at it as just a job.

Another speaker talked about the rise in cyber-attacks and asked the attendees if their pension systems were protected in the event of a successful cyber-attack. In 2016, data breaches were up 40 percent from the previous year. Fifty-five percent of these attacks were hacking, phishing and skimming. Just google "governments agencies hacked" and you'll get results showing that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) was hacked, resulting in an estimated 21.5 million stolen records; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Human Services (DHS) were targets of hackers; and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was hacked, with an estimated 700,000 social security numbers stolen.

Public pension systems have thousands and thousands of records containing the personal information of public employees. They also have assets in the millions to sometimes billions of dollars. These things make them prime target for hackers.

I'm happy to report I talked to ISPA member and Municipal Fire and Police Retirement System of Iowa (MFPRSI) Board of Trustees Chairperson Marty Pottebaum. Pottebaum told me MFPRSI already has several measures in place protecting their computer systems and the members' information. MFPRSI is also currently working with a company to analyze, strengthen and update their systems and protocols to protect them from cyber-attacks. This same company also provides the pension system and members with assistance and protection in the event of a system compromise.

Remember, it is up to each of us to not lose sight of our dedication and commitment to ourselves, our employees, our employers and our communities. Our long-term goal must be to continue to work each and every day to make our communities a better place to work and live. If we weaken public employee pensions, we make this a much harder job to accomplish.

Stay safe and please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.