



## **KEA Comments - Press Conference on Pension Nov 6, 2017**

**Stephanie Winkler, KEA President**

Today we join other education stakeholder groups in solidarity in the presentation of a plan that represents a shared responsibility approach to our current public pension concerns.

I want to first be clear that our stance on pensions continues to be that we have a desperate FUNDING problem in the Commonwealth. We need substantial and dedicated revenue streams for:

- 1) The Unfunded liability of Kentucky's public pension systems;
- 2) Public education K-12 in general; and
- 3) Other essential government functions, like Medicaid coverage, that have gone unaddressed or are in danger because of insufficient revenue.

School districts across KY have desperate needs to provide opportunities for students to learn and grow. Rural districts where the school system is the largest employer, the reassessment of the unmined mineral tax in Eastern Kentucky, and ever-changing technology barriers have taken a toll on the total district budgets.

Our students deserve the very best we can provide. Without new revenue we will continue to be forced to do more with less. At some point when public school funding is so scarce that we will no longer be able to provide the necessary tools and resources to help kids thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it will be Kentucky's students who suffer the most.

Public service is not a lucrative profession for anyone. That's not why we do it. We educate citizens so that our communities will have a strong and continuous workforce to keep our businesses thriving and our local economies strong. The public service we provide is dictated by our Kentucky Constitution. It states that that we shall provide a system of common schools so that every child in Kentucky has an equal opportunity to learn and thrive. In order to accomplish this goal, it takes all of us, those in education workforce and beyond. Education is everyone's responsibility. Part of that responsibility is each of us doing our part to ensure

that those educating our children make a living wage and are taken care of in retirement in exchange for providing such a vital service for so long. Let's not forget that public service employees are some of the most consistent tax payers in the state. They contribute every paycheck without fail to not only their own benefits, but also to the benefit of other public service employees as well.

The Governor's plan does many things that by our estimation will destroy public service as we know it. The elimination of our inviolable contract, the removal of language that affords school employees sick leave, the suspension of cost of living adjustments for retired teachers, the removal of disability and life insurance, and most of all the switch from a dependable defined benefit pension to a unreliable and very expensive defined contribution plan.

It is for these reasons that we put forth this new shared responsibility plan today. We did this once before very successfully in 2010 to fix retiree healthcare funding for teachers. This plan is touted as a nationally recognized way to prefund retired employee healthcare.

Let's make the news for once in this state for something positive. Let's put all the rhetoric aside and truly work together to achieve a successful path forward we can all be proud of.

No public employee deserves the angst, ridicule, and posturing that we have seen over the last few months by some of our elected officials. We need not be deterred by partisan conversations. We need to keep focus on funding our state's liabilities and keep the promises made to our public service workers.