

Why Illinois Is In Trouble – 132,188 Public Employees With \$100,000+ Paychecks Cost Taxpayers \$17 Billion

Description

USA: So, just who is making all of this money?

Meet the Illinois government employee \$100,000 Club. It's comprised of 132,188 public employees and retirees who earned a new 'minimum wage' of \$100,000 or more.

While crime skyrockets in the neighborhoods, test scores plummet in the public schools, and inflation decimates private-sector paychecks, the Illinois public employee class is living the good life.

Our auditors at OpenTheBooks.com found nearly 500 educators in the public schools with salaries between \$200,000 and \$439,000. In small towns, city managers made up to \$341,300. Three doctors at the University of Illinois at Chicago earned incomes between \$1 million and \$2.1 million.

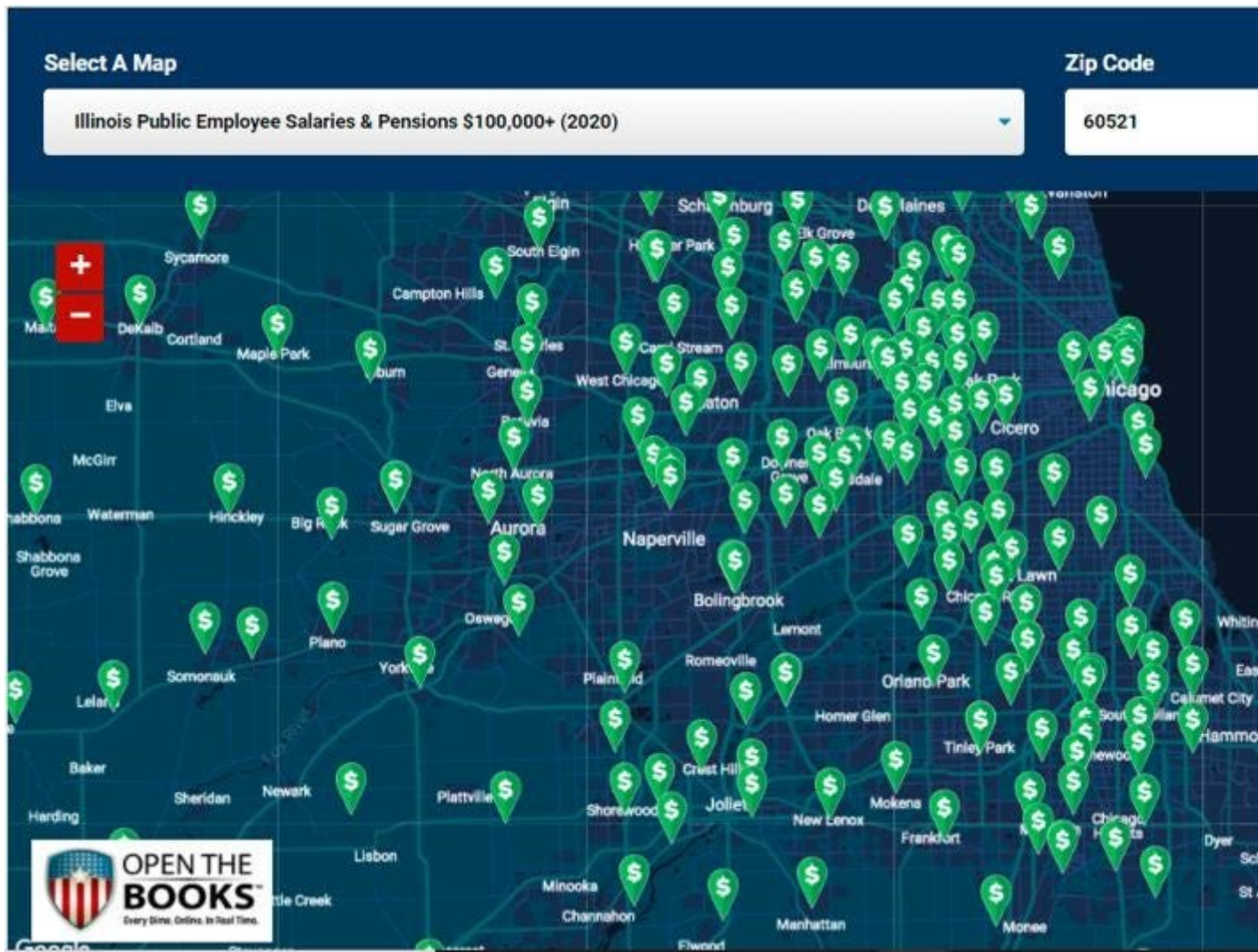
Barbers trimmed off \$104,000 at State Corrections; janitors at the Chicago Transit Authority cleaned up \$143,634; bus drivers in Chicago picked up \$242,812; and suburban community college presidents made \$418,677.

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Using our interactive mapping tool, [quickly review](#) (by employer ZIP code) the 132,188 public employees and retirees across Illinois making more than \$100,000. Just [click](#) a pin (ZIP Code) and *scroll down* to see the results in your hometown rendered in the chart beneath the map.



Meet your local members of the Illinois \$100,000 Club 2021. Our auditors at [OpenTheBooks.com](https://www.openthebooks.com) found compiled the list of six-figure public employees using Freedom of Information Act requests.

Following The Money

Public schools (43,500) – Last year, 26,904 educators earned six-figure salaries while 16,592 *retirees* pocketed \$100,000+ pensions. However, test scores plummeted with only 31-percent of students reading at grade level.

Big salaries: Eighteen school superintendents made \$300,000+, among them Edward Mansfield (Homewood Flossmoor D233— \$434,323); Michael Lubelfeld (North Shore School D112— \$392,952); Gregory Jackson (Ford Heights D169—\$379,465); Kevin Nohely (Dolton School D148—\$373,626); and Blair Nuccio (Indian Springs D109—\$355,154).

Big pensions: Eighteen retired school superintendents received \$300,000+ in retirement pensions, among them Lawrence A. Wyllie (Lincoln-Way CHSD 210 – \$361,787.64); Henry Bangser (New Trier

Township HSD 203 – \$351,676); Gary Catalani (Wheaton-Warrenville Unit SD 200 – \$350,113.08); Laura Murray (Homewood-Flossmoor CHSD 233 – \$344,450); and Mary Curley (Hinsdale CCSD 181 – \$334,540.20).

TOP 10

SALARIES OF

CITY OF CHICAGO PUBLIC E

MICHAEL SEISER	POLICE OFFIC
CARMELITA WILEY EARLS	BATTALION C
THOMAS CARBONNEAU	DISTRICT CH
JEFFREY MAYER	DEPUTY DIST
JOHN GIORDANO	DEPUTY DIST
DAVID DIETZ	DEPUTY DIST
MICHAEL SPENCER	DISTRICT CH
WILLIAM MEADOR	SERGEANT
JOHN SALEMME	POLICE OFFIC
MICHAEL MURDOCK	BATTALION C

Source: City of Chicago Department of Finance

In 2021, the Top 10 most highly compensation City of Chicago employees.

Chicago (28,000) – Why is crime out of control in Chicago? It's a matter of political will— not pay. The Chicago police and fire departments paid 600 employees between \$200,000 and \$480,000 in cash compensation last year.

In Chicago, 41 'street light repair' workers made between \$100,000 and \$196,123 and 61 city 'sign painters' made six-figures up to \$145,341. The boss at the city auto pound reaped \$124,783 while the janitors at the auto pound made six-figures too. 'Sanitation laborers' made up to \$125,783.

In Chicago Public Schools (CPS), CEO, Janice K. Jackson made \$361,762: \$298,923 in salary with \$62,839 in benefits. Jackson's salary alone exceeded the pay of the U.S. Secretary of Education (\$203,500) — a cabinet-level position – by \$95,423.

However, student scores plummeted. *Just 26-percent of eleventh graders perform at grade level in math and seven in ten students could not read at grade level.*

No matter, we found the average teacher in the Chicago Public Schools made \$108,730 last year when including benefits. In addition, there were 1,823 employees across six departments – outside the classroom – now dedicated to diversity, equity, inclusion efforts.

The Chicago Transit Authority, operator of trains and busses, paid rail service supervisors up to \$294,609; ironworkers as much as \$251,376; and line workers \$240,835. A signal maintainer took home \$302,075, a telephone line worker was paid \$247,677 and a customer service representative made \$207,202.

Incredibly, 378 CTA bus drivers took home \$100,000+ and top earner Yolanda Harris picked up \$242,812.

Colleges & universities (18,000) – University of Illinois basketball coach Bradley Underwood earned \$3.2 million last year. Fady Toufic Charbel (\$2.029 million); Mark Gonzalez (\$1.059 million); and Konstantin Slavin (\$1.041 million) are million-dollar doctors at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

Universities: Highly compensated employees included those that work for the University of Illinois Foundation—a private fundraising foundation for the university. A staggering 42 employees cleaned off nearly \$7 million in cash compensation making between \$100,000 and \$294,700 each. The top-paid employee, Edward Wald (\$294,700), out-earned the president at Northern Illinois University and every other state university (except Illinois State).

Retired professors have some of the biggest pensions: University of Illinois at Chicago professor Wolodymyr Minkowycz (\$426,656), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign physics prof Gordon Baym (\$285,669) and engineering prof Vernon Snoeyink (\$274,664).

Junior colleges: The top paid presidents included Christine Jean Sobek (Waubonsee Community

College — \$418,677) and Thomas Ramage (Parkland College—\$339,000). Top retirees included Zelema Harris (Parkland College—\$253,297); John Swalec (Waubensee Community College—\$239,871); and Vernon Crawley (Moraine Valley Community College— \$239,851).

State of Illinois (16,500) – Eight barbers at Corrections made between \$102,300 and \$104,000. Veterans, Human Services, and Corrections paid 484 nurses between \$100,100 and \$255,300.

The top paid sergeants at the State Police earned \$309,600. *We found more state police officers retired on six-figure pensions (1,555) than officers currently paid on six-figure salaries (1,540)!*

Gov. Pritzker appointed Cecelia Abundis (\$147,500) [as Director of Professional Regulations at the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation](#) (IDFPR). It was an odd pick. Years ago, [we exposed Abundis](#) billing taxpayers for her 250-mile one-way “commute” from her home in Michigan to Chicago as she “managed” cases after she was promoted to supervisor in Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s office.

A court-ordered monitor, Dr. Stewart Pablo, was paid \$321,500 by taxpayers to report on the barriers to access mental healthcare within the prison system – his pay amounts to approximately \$1.7 million during the past five years.

TOP 10 MOST HIGHLY C

ILLINOIS VILLAGE A



BARRY KRUMSTOK

ERIKA STORLIE

MICHAEL ELLIS

REID OTTESEN

RICHARD NAHRSTADT

MICHAEL CASSADY

DANE BRAGG

JAMES GRABOWSKI

KENT STREET

JASON WICHA

Source: FOIA Illinois Teachers Retirement System (TRS)

The Big Dogs of Illinois municipal government (2021).

Cities & villages (14,500) – Small town managers collect high pay, along with perks and pension benefits. Top paid managers were Michael J. Ellis (Village of Grayslake — \$302,408); Reid Ottesen (Village of Palatine — \$300,900); Richard Nahrstadt (Village of Northbrook – \$280,516); and Stephanie Hannon (Village of Bannockburn – \$252,360).

Most local six-figure employees are in the police and fire departments. The top-paid local police officer worked in Deerfield, John Sliozis (\$226,241) although the next five officers making more than \$200,000 worked for the Aurora department.

The small town of Rosemont (pop. 4,200), near O'Hare International Airport, has three highly compensated officials:

- Patrick Nagle (\$282,304—head of the Allstate Arena entertainment venue),
- Christopher R. Stephens (\$278,227—Executive Director of the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center), and
- Christopher's [uncle](#) mayor Bradley A. Stephens (\$225,652) – who also made \$70,100 as an elected state rep. (Bradley is the son of Rosemont's founding mayor, Donald Stephens, whom the convention center is named after.)

Private associations, nonprofits and retired lawmakers

There are several legal loopholes for individuals to access state funding through private associations, nonprofit organizations, and state legislative bodies.

- Retired Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley (D) double dipped pension systems for nearly \$249,636. Daley made \$158,076 per year in pension payouts after a short eight-year career as a state senator plus another \$91,560 per year in city pension payouts for his 22 years as the mayor of Chicago.
- Three top paid earners within the municipal-government pension system *work for private associations* – not government. Brad Cole of the Illinois Municipal League pulled down \$437,447, up from \$407,656, (2020). Peter Murphy, executive director of Illinois Association of Park Districts, made \$357,816, while Brett Davis, executive director of the Park District Risk management Agency, brought in \$342,405.
- Former Illinois Governor Jim Edgar (R) double dipped pension systems: General Assembly pension (\$186,660 per year) and University Retirement System pension (\$90,336). Last year, Edgar's total payout in pension heaven? \$276,996

Since Edgar left the governorship in 1999, we estimate that he earned \$2.4 million in compensation from the University of Illinois (2000-2013) and another \$2.5 million in pension payments from his career as legislator, secretary of state and governor.

Highly compensated locals

DuPage County employees have a history of hefty salaries and pensions. In fact, the old county Republican guard are all retired on golden-parachute public pensions including former state's attorney Joe Birkett (\$182,910); former sheriff John Zaruba (\$165,293); and former county clerk Gary King (\$157,513).

Local park district administrators out earned the state director of parks (\$158,100). These included James Pilmer (\$256,447 at Fox Valley); Raymond McGury (\$227,470 at Naperville); Michael Benard (\$213,158 at Wheaton). The top pension payments for park retirees also exceeded \$200,000 per year: Steven Messerli and Robert Vaughan, each of Fox Valley Park District, respectively took home \$225,664 and \$219,559 in retirement pension.

Even water district employees tapped into the largess: David Miller (North Shore Water Reclamation District — \$235,615); Mark Eddington (Kishwaukee Water Reclamation District— \$189,085); and John Spatz (DuPage Water Commission— \$225,000). And retirees again received top payments—Albin Pagorski and Gregory Hergenroeder respectively got \$226,817 and \$216,795 in pensions from the Fox River Water Reclamation District.



In 2021, there were 132,188 public employees and retirees making \$100,000 or more—up from 94,000 just four years earlier .

Soon—It Could Get A Lot Worse

Two years ago, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker wanted to hike the income tax during pandemic and pushed for a state constitutional amendment to allow for a progressive income tax. However, the voters shot it down, 55-45.

This year, Pritzker is pushing Amendment 1 – which would enshrine long-term employment contracts for government workers, multi-year salary increases, constitutional backed lifetime pensions, the power to strike, and much more.

It would essentially make Illinois “unreformable.” A recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial by Wirepoints was headlined, “Unions Ask Illinois Voters To Sign Over Control Of The State.”

Already, updated analysis by the American Legislative Exchange Council shows that an Illinois family of four now owes two and a half times more in unfunded government pension liabilities (\$168,000) than they earn in household income (\$63,585). In a state of 13 million residents, every man, woman, and child owes \$42,000 — on an estimated \$533 billion pension liability for public employees.

Illinois may have already crossed the Rubicon. And now the public-sector unions are giving the state the last push off the cliff.

Note: all compensation amounts listed are cash compensation, or pensionable compensation and do not incorporate the cost of benefits, i.e. health insurance, etc., unless otherwise cited.

Request for comment: if a public employee or organization mentioned in the piece would like to submit a comment, we will update the piece as soon as possible.

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