

## RIVERSIDE COUNTY: Supervisors consider paying toward their pensions

The county board already favors contributing to their own pensions to save \$14 million over 3 years



STAN LIM/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Riverside County Board of Supervisors Chairman Bob Buster said he supports a plan for elected officials and county management to begin paying their own retirement contributions. The plan goes before supervisors Tuesday.

1 of 2



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Riverside County supervisors Tuesday will take up a measure requiring all county elected officials and management to pay their own retirement contributions.

Supervisors earlier this month voted in favor of the concept but had yet to work out the details.

The plan before supervisors Tuesday outlines changes that would be phased in over the next two to three years. It will apply to all county elected officials, management and other employees not represented by a union.

Requiring those officials and workers to pay their own retirement is expected to save the county at least \$2.25 million this year, \$6.77 million in fiscal 2012-13 and \$5.22 million annually in future years, according to the proposal.

Currently, general county workers — including supervisors — pay 8 percent of their salary toward retirement for the first five years of employment. After that, the county covers both the employee and employer retirement contributions. Public-safety employees pay 9 percent for the first three years of employment.

Under the county's plan, elected officials and top management who have been there longer than five years would pay 4 percent of their salary toward retirement starting Dec. 1 and an additional 4 percent in June, bringing it to 8 percent.

For other workers, the county's human resources director is recommending that supervisors consider a three-year period to phase in the 8 percent employee retirement contributions, since those employees are paid less

than management and are in jobs equivalent to those represented by unions. These employees would pay 3 percent this year, 6 percent next year and the full 8 percent in 2013.

The plan also would provide for new step pay increases of 2.71 percent "in recognition of the hardship caused" by requiring employees to pay more toward their own retirement, according to the proposal.

With the pay increases accounted for, county officials say the plan would save a combined \$14 million over the next three years.

The county is facing an \$80 million budget shortfall for the next fiscal year and has been looking for ways to permanently align expenses with declining revenues.

County supervisors and management have been asking employees during contract talks to begin paying for their own retirement costs. In a contract imposed on the Riverside Sheriff's Association, which represents deputies, supervisors also required the employee retirement contributions. The association is challenging the imposed contract.

Last week, members of the Service Employees International Union Local 721 came to the board's meeting to tell of financial hardship and urge supervisors to lead by example and take a pay cut. Tracy Silveria, an SEIU spokeswoman, said by email Friday that the union would have no comment until after the board's Tuesday meeting.

In a telephone interview Thursday, Supervisor Bob Buster said he favors the plan.

"I thought it should have been done several months ago, at least," he said. "We have been talking about this for six months or more."

Buster said the plan provides immediate savings.

"That is significant to me," he said.

Supervisor Marion Ashley agreed and said it is the right step to take.

"It is not chump change," he said. "This saves a lot of money right away."

But Ashley said there are details that need discussion. For instance, supervisors should discuss whether more employees get three years to begin paying the full 8 percent, he said.

And in some cases, requiring the executive management in the Sheriff's Department to pay their full 9 percent share could mean they would be making less money than some of the employees they oversee, particularly those represented by the Law Enforcement Management Union, Ashley said.

"We have to tailor it to make it fit," Ashley said.

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