

3069 Calle Mariposa
Santa Barbara, California 93105-2740
April 4, 2011

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

RE: Agenda Item No. 4, Hearing of April 5, 2011, Recommended Actions Regarding County Retirement Programs

Dear Chair Gray and Members of the Board,

I implore you, don't repeat the mistakes of the past by implementing certain features of a new lower-benefit retirement program "tier" for *new* employees as recommended in your staff report, specifically items 1, 4, and 7 (pp. 1 & 2). As regards the three recommended actions for *current* employees (items 1-3, p. 2), I think that these might be reasonable and proper, subject to good-faith "meet and confer" negotiations with all employee organizations that might change the specific details of such actions.

As many of you know, I proudly worked for the county from January 1979 to May 2007, a span of over 28 years. I deliberately chose a career with Santa Barbara County because my main personal goal was to earn a decent living while serving the public at large, using the knowledge and skills that I acquired from my University of California (UCSB) education and prior work experience, both private and university-related. I never expected to get rich from this career, but I did expect that at such time as I left county employment, I'd have a decent pension to allow me to stay in the area after retirement.

This has happened. I did not get rich working for the county, and my net retirement income of about \$30,100¹ a year won't make me rich anytime soon. However, despite my wife's continuing unemployment and my only-occasional supplemental income from other jobs since 2007, we've managed to stay healthy, keep our Santa Barbara home, and weather the latest "economic downturn" without depleting our old-age savings. Chalk it up to good planning, frugal and simple living, and healthy doses of good luck.

I fear that if your Board follows through on the recommended changes to the retirement programs for new and existing employees, the current and future generations of county employees won't be able to do what I've done. This would have many adverse results, not the least of which would be: more difficult employee recruitment and retention for the county; more county employees living outside the area; and more former long-time county employees leaving the county after retirement for areas with lower living costs.

¹ After federal & state income tax withholding, health insurance premiums, and voluntary deductions for the charitable giving program and the retirees' association

This all would add up to: significantly reduced quality of public service provided by the county to its residents and out-of-area clients; great long-term harm to local communities; and avoidable personal hardships for future county retirees.

The county weathered several major “economic downturns” during my career, during the early 1980s, early 1990s and early 2000s, without gutting its retirement programs. However, in the ‘80s and ‘90s, prior county administrations made experiments with reduced-benefit retirement “tiers.” These had various problems that led subsequent county administrations to rescind the lower-benefit “trail of tiers” and stick with good-but-not-lavish programs that allow long-term county employees to have a decent, heartily-earned post-retirement living.

In conclusion, *please* don’t repeat the mistakes of past Boards of Supervisors and administrators by gutting the county’s retirement program for new hires, and-or by making any particularly onerous changes for existing employees. Making all of the recommended changes would lead to numerous adverse results for county service recipients and county employees, and ultimately would have to be undone by future Boards of Supervisors and administrators after much harm had been done. A lot of such harm would be irreversible and irretrievable.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Sincerely,



Gregory Mohr

copy: Lila Deeds, Santa Barbara County Employees Retirement System (via e-mail)