

Dear Honorable Legislators:

My name is Rachel Grocha-Welch and I am a public employee from the County of Santa Clara where I work as a forensic chemist.

I welcome Governor Brown's pension reform plan as a first step toward making some needed changes to our state's pension system. I agree with the premise we all need to take some cuts to help our state in these tough economic times. You are well aware, I'm sure, of the millions of dollars in concessions public workers have collectively agreed to – at the bargaining table.

We support some of the ideas, such as banning the use of pension spiking, which is a manipulation of salaries that is more often found in the ranks of upper management.

But the governor's plan also contained ideas that just did not seem well-thought out.

I would like to specifically address the proposal to make normal pension costs be shared equally by employers and employees. You should know virtually all public employees already pay at or above the 50% of the normal cost from the employee.

Our biggest objection to the so-called 50-50 cost-sharing plan is that certain employers have negotiated to pay the employee share. These negotiations took place in the arena of collective bargaining, which we should not tamper with.

You will hear this repeatedly from us – because it's an objection that applies to the other planks from the governor's proposal. Pensions are a negotiated benefit that is but one part of the overall employee compensation for public service. No one size can fit all, up and down the state, and yet that's what the governor is proposing.

A parks worker for the city of Delano in Central California might not desire the same compensation package as the safety officer in San Francisco.

There's salary, healthcare, holidays off – these, together with pension, are all weighed together to create a fair and equitable contract to both the employee and employer.

A top-down mandate from Sacramento is a heavy-handed hammer that quashes the give and take of the collective bargaining process.

I urge you to please keep this in mind as you go forward with your work on pension reform.

Sincerely,

Dec. 1, 2011