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Texas state retirees aim for pension bump

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To the long list of interests hoping to benefit from [Texas' record \\$32.7 billion surplus](#), add former state employees.

- These are, among others, retired custodians at the Capitol, the workers collecting fees at state parks and transportation workers preparing roadways for icy weather.

Why it matters: Despite vying for years for a bump, retired state employees have not seen a pension cost-of-living adjustment since 2001.

- Meanwhile, they're squeezed [as the cost of living has zoomed up](#) the last two decades.

By the numbers: Roughly 123,000 Texans get pension checks from the Employees Retirement System of Texas — including at least 24,800 in the nine Texas Senate districts that represent most of Greater Houston.

- Fully funding a 10% cost-of-living adjustment for state retirees would cost about \$4.2 billion.

Flashback: In each of the last two legislative sessions, Texas lawmakers gave retired teachers a 13th paycheck — on top of the usual 12 monthly checks they receive each year.

- State leaders say they want to approve an extra check for teachers again this session.

Yes, but: Retired state employees don't have the political pull of teachers, who are prominent and sympathetic employees, especially in rural parts of the state.

- "That becomes an emotional tug," Luther Elmore, a state retiree who is also president of the [AFSCME Texas Retirees, Chapter 12](#), tells Axios. "We're talking about the teachers for itty-bitty school children. Where's the emotional pull when the job is cutting the grass or dumping the bedpan at the state hospital or cleaning the toilets at the Capitol?"

What they want: Along with the \$4.2 billion cost-of-living adjustment, retired state workers are fighting at the Capitol for at least the same 13th check that retired teachers will be getting — about \$1,800 per retiree, or about \$250 million overall.

Of note: Roughly three-fourths of pension plans sponsored by states and local governments provide some form of an automatic cost-of-living adjustment, [per the National Association of State Retirement Administrators](#).

What they're saying: Among retirees, "their concerns are, do I buy milk or do I buy eggs?" Richard Jankowski, president of the Texas Department of Public Safety Officers Association, tells Axios.

- Older retirees get monthly checks between \$1,200 and \$1,500, Jankowski says. Some of them are [forced back into the workplace](#).

Between the lines: The term "budget surplus" feels baked into practically every proposal at the Capitol this session, as lawmakers pushing everything from property tax cuts to tampon tax reform pin their arguments to the state's flush coffers.

- At the start of the session, the state's chief financial officer said the state has a [\\$32.7 billion budget surplus](#).

What's next: Texas House members voted to put the pensioners' ask [in an unfunded wish list](#), to be hashed out behind closed doors later in the session, which ends in six weeks, leaving the retirees in limbo.