

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
86R3705 KSM-F

H.C.R. 19
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Administration
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Social Security is the foundation for retirement income for tens of millions of American workers and their families. Nearly two-thirds of the older Americans who receive program benefits rely on Social Security for 50 percent or more of their total income, and one-third rely on it for 90 percent or more. Among beneficiaries aged 80 and older, 42 percent rely on Social Security for nearly all of their income.

Two Social Security provisions, however, the Government Pension Offset (GPO), enacted in 1977, and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), enacted in 1983, severely and unfairly penalize recipients of public pensions.

The GPO effectively prohibits some government retirees from collecting both their own pension and full Social Security benefits as a surviving spouse. An estimated nine out of ten public employees affected by the GPO lose their entire spousal benefit, even though their spouses paid Social Security taxes for many years.

WEP reduces the Social Security benefit for public employees who did not participate in Social Security while working for the government, but who at some time in their careers were in jobs where they paid Social Security taxes for the period required to qualify for retirement benefits. WEP can deprive a retiree of nearly \$450 a month in Social Security benefits duly earned by that individual.

Although these provisions were intended to curtail the payment of windfall benefits to highly paid government employees, in practice they have had and continue to have devastating consequences for low-income employees who worked for many years as public servants; more than two million government employees and retirees are affected by either GPO or WEP or both, and the repercussions are felt most acutely in Texas and 14 other states where a high proportion of public employees participate in state or municipal retirement systems that do not include Social Security.

These punitive and discriminatory provisions target hundreds of thousands of teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other public servants; although the vast majority of Texas school employees participate in the state's teacher retirement system and therefore are not required to and do not participate in the Social Security system, many Texas teachers and other public school employees nonetheless have earned Social Security benefits on their own behalf through other employment, WEP notwithstanding, or would be entitled to spousal Social Security benefits based on their spouses' lifetime earnings were it not for the GPO penalty. These provisions cause veteran teachers to retire prematurely and discourage qualified individuals from entering the teaching profession at precisely the time that Texas and the nation face a severe shortage of highly qualified educators.

GPO and WEP as applied to public employees are unreasonable and unjust and will cause tens of thousands of government retirees to experience a diminished quality of life or be forced to return to work to make up for the effects of these provisions.

RESOLVED

That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to repeal the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision of the Social Security Act.

That the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to Congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.