

# Feigenholtz updates residents on Illinois Medicaid reform, now signed by Quinn

**Darryl Grant**

Chicago Political Buzz Examiner



Sara Feigenholtz speaking before area constituents in Lakeview Tuesday evening in Chicago

Photo credit:

Tiffany Moy/Office of State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz

House veteran, State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, 12th District, (D-Chicago) held an informal meeting for district constituents Tuesday evening in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood, in the heart of "Boystown", at the trendy restaurant, Taverna 750; and co-hosted by the Central Lakeview Merchant's Association.

Feigenholtz, a longtime supporter of the LGBT community, has also long been an ardent advocate for the needs of all her constituents, as evidenced by the variety of those gathered: retirees, some recent, some not; a special needs person, a twenty-something who wanted to serve as a volunteer for the Obama re-election campaign; a well-heeled, and up-beat matron; a senior, and a self-avowed advocate for the mental health community.

Ever the well-briefed and prepared official, she gave a thorough review of her efforts during the most recent budget session, as part of a bi-partisan panel, charged by Gov. Pat Quinn, in February to cut \$2.7 billion from Illinois' then financially imperiled Medicaid program.

She noted, in particular, that as the daughter of a physician, and "the chair of the House Appropriations Committee for twelve years, I feel this year was a watershed year to prevent Medicaid from going bankrupt."

Feigenholtz also admitted the difficulty in meeting the governor's mandate, and while it was "very painful", but that she, and the three other members, were able to find, and make only \$1.6 billion in cuts, in what she referred to as

“utilization controls”; and gave as examples: podiatric coverage to only diabetics, and for prescription eyeglasses a limit of one pair every two years.”

These, and other adjustments were made to “maintain integrity of care” for those people that truly need the benefits of the Medicaid program.

She also railed at the temerity of out-of-state residents who were illegally accessing the program (to perhaps the surprise of many present), and bemoaned that the “big problem is that there is no updated IT system that can detect fraud.”

Carefully noting that her committee did not cut those subsidies to the so-called “safety-net” hospitals, such as Mercy, Loretto, and Children’s; the ones that take the lions-share of Medicaid patients, and dollars; she noted that this was accomplished, not merely through legislative maneuvering, but to the additional revenue brought by another cigarette tax of \$1- per- pack increase, plus additional monies from the federal government.

And, today, in Springfield, [Gov. Quinn](#) signed the legislation that Feigenholtz proposed, as part of her bi-partisan efforts.

Regretfully, she told the group - reflected in her voice – that they were unable to save the IL Cares Rx program that helped elderly people pay for medication not covered under Medicare Part D, the so-called “doughnut hole”, which now leaves many seniors scrambling to fill that void; only saying simply, “we could not restore it, and that its demise was one of the “sad and tough choices”, that she and the other panel members had to make to “shrink the pie” and save Medicaid.

Feigenholtz also asked for a show of hands from those present if they had heard that “the state of Illinois doesn’t pay its bills.” Almost all of the hands shot up, in unison, in response. She then went on to detail how “three months of liability can be pushed into the next fiscal year” thus putting state accounts into “crisis mode”, and that the legislature in its next reconvened session will address to “remediate” the problem.

With passion, she also noted to the concerns of some of those present during the question-and-answer period, that she was wholly “committed to mental health in Illinois”, and expressed particular sadness that the eponymous Counseling Center of Lakeview had to close after 40 years due to financial difficulties, many of which stemmed from a state budget that was awash in red ink, and could not help save it.

The elephant in the room, of course, was the [unfunded liability to the state pension fund](#), to the tune of \$83 billion, and which represents the largest remaining item on the legislative “To-do” list, when the Assembly reconvenes.

Feigenholtz did admit, however, that “some kind of choices on pensions” have to be made to close the record gap, but noted that unions have pushed “the salaries higher up”, and that she while she is “unsure how we got here”, reform is imminent.

And, she was adamant that the original proposal by Speaker of the House, Michael Madigan, who has effectively dropped his original sponsorship, is still necessary (now sponsored by House Minority Republican leader Tom Cross) to shift the cost to local suburban school districts.

The debate, which was often fierce in the session, on who should pay retirement costs, either the states, or the local school districts has remain unresolved; and only time will tell which side wins. As it stands, the [Cross plan](#) "leaves out the pension shift but would make schools responsible for any retirement costs stemming from generous, late-career raises to employees."

For her part, Feigenholtz is adamant, as she emphasized, "Why should we pay for suburbanites – when we [who live in the city] pay double?"

***Follow me on Twitter @dgrantchi***