

Counties may be forced to reveal workers' pension payments

By Catherine Saillant, Los Angeles Times

Some of California 's largest counties — including Los Angeles — could be forced to reveal the names and retirement benefits of tens of thousands of public employees under an appeals court ruling.

The ruling, issued last week by the 3rd District Court of Appeal, marks the first time an appeals court has ordered the pension information released and came despite arguments from county officials and labor unions that it would violate the privacy of local government employees across the state.

Advocates contend the public has a right to know what it's paying and should have the ability to investigate whether individual workers are engaging in such practices as salary spiking to fatten their retirement pay.

In the wake of the ruling , Ventura County 's retirement board agreed Monday to release the names and pension benefits of county retirees there.

The ruling ordered the Sacramento County pension system to hand over the names and pension pay for 8,500 retirees. Labor has fought for years to keep the information confidential.

In addition to Sacramento , 19 other counties in California could be affected by the ruling, including Los Angeles , Orange , San Diego and San Bernardino . All operate outside of CalPERS, the state's enormous public pension system, which already makes the data public.

Richard Stensrud, the Sacramento board's chief, said retirement trustees there would meet Thursday to discuss how to respond to the decision. He noted that retirement boards in two other counties — San Diego and Sonoma — have decisions in other appellate courts pending.

"We think our board should have an opportunity to discuss how they want to proceed," Stensrud said.