

2019 Action Alert 3

GSRA is once again planning a concerted campaign of contacting those on whom we rely (legislators, leadership, administration, ERS board members) for COLAs. This is the first of several planned writing campaigns. How much you need and want a COLA should motivate you to participate in ALL of our campaigns.

The Governor's 2020 Budget contains funds for state employees' and teachers' pay raises as well as COLAs for TRS retirees. But once again there is no money for ERS state retirees' COLAs.

State retirees have not received a Cost of Living Increase since January 2009, ten years ago. We are the only group that has been treated this way. We have been very appreciative of the non-compounding benefit adjustments on the first \$30,000 of annual benefits we have received these past three years; however, these one-time grants have not come close to keeping up with the approximately 25% reduction in purchasing power since we received the last of 40 plus successive annual 3% COLAs in 2009.

State retirees' median benefits are only \$22,000 annually. With the reduced purchasing power combined with increasing medical, pharmaceutical and other old age costs, many retirees are facing real hardships choosing which expenses to pay from their meager budgets.

The Governor and members of the state legislature have stated that this year the State is in excellent financial condition. Therefore, restoring ERS COLAs is not only the right thing to do; it is very doable.

What you as an ERS retiree and GSRA member should do now:

You should use this Action Alert by clicking **TAKE ACTION** below to write your state representative and ask him or her, if on the House Appropriations Committee below, to support appropriating funds for a 3% COLA for state retirees in the House version of the 2020 state budget. If your representative is not on the Appropriations Committee below, use this Action Alert to request your representative to support a 3% COLA **AND** contact their fellow representatives on the House Appropriations Committee below to request their support as well. Make sure you write your message in the prepared Action Alert email to your legislator where it says "**GSRA member insert message here.**" It would also be good to call your representative.

Below is a list of House Appropriations Committee members:

Barr, Timothy
Belton, Dave
Benton, Tommy
Beverly, James
Blackmon, Shaw
Bruce, Roger
Burns, Jon G.
Cantrell, Wes
Carson, John

Cheokas, Mike
Clark, David
Clark, Heath
Collins, J.
Cooke, Kevin
Dempsey, Katie M.
Dickerson, Pam
Dickey, Robert
Dollar, Matt
Dunahoo, Emory
Efstration, Chuck
England, Terry
Fleming, Barry
Gardner, Pat
Gilliard, Carl Wayne
Glanton, Mike
Gravley, Micah
Greene, Gerald E
Harrell, Brett
Hatchett, Matt
Hawkins, Lee
Henson, Michele
Hitchens, Bill
Houston, Penny
Howard, Henry "Wayne"
Hugley, Carolyn
Jackson, Mack
Jasperse, Rick
Jones, Jan
Jones, Sheila
Jones, Todd
Kirby, Tom
Knight, David
LaRiccia, Dominic
Lott, Jodi
Lumsden, Eddie
Martin, Chuck
Mathiak, Karen
Morris, Greg
Morris, Marc
Nix, Randy
Oliver, Mary Margaret
Parrish, Butch
Parsons, Don
Petrea, Jesse
Pirkle, ClayVice
Powell, Alan
Powell, Jay
Prince, Brian
Pruett, Jimmy

Reeves, Bert
Ridley, Jason
Rogers, Terry
Rutledge, Dale
Rynders, Ed
Setzler, Ed
Silcox, Deborah
Smith, Lynn
Smith, Richard H.
Smyre, Calvin
Stephens, Ron
Stovall, Valencia
Tankersley, Jan
Tanner, Kevin
Tarvin, Steve
Taylor, Darlene K.
Watson, Sam
Welch, Andrew J.
Werkheiser, Bill
Williams, Al
Williams, Rick

After you write your message to your representative (in the space where it says: "**GSRA Member insert message here**"), let your representative know that you are providing for his/her information an op-ed piece written by President Jim Sommerville for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. **You can cut and paste Jim's article below into your message to your representative.** Here is that piece:

STATE RETIREES DESERVE TO BE TREATED BETTER

State retirees in Georgia have not received a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for 10 years, which reduces the purchasing power of their pension benefits by an estimated 25% and fails to fulfill the promises made to them when they accepted state employment.

This sad story began in 2009, when Georgia's government was experiencing sharply reduced revenues due to the Great Recession. State retirees understood that everyone had to do their share to reduce expenditures to help balance the budget. But as state revenues increased in the following years, other areas of government have had their budgets restored -- yet the Employees Retirement Systems (ERS) board has continued to deny state retirees a COLA.

The ERS board granted its first 3% COLA in 1970, under the Official Code of Georgia Annotated 47-2-29(a), which reads in part: "the Board of Trustees (Board) of the Employees Retirement System (ERS) is authorized to adopt a method of providing for post-retirement adjustments for the purpose of maintaining essentially no less purchasing power for a beneficiary in his retirement years." During high inflation years, the board even granted retirees supplemental COLAs in addition to the standard 3%.

What's more, the ERS Mission Statement states: "Our mission is to be the guardian of the State of Georgia's retirement plans and to promote a dignified retirement for our members, retirees and their beneficiaries." The ERS' motto is "Serving those who served Georgia" and its 2018 annual report is entitled "Building a bridge to a more comfortable retirement."

In contrast to those fine words, retirees now face a future of rising costs and a retirement income that continues to stagnate. Why is the state failing to meet the commitments and promises made to its retirees?

The answer may be found in the recent State Auditors' report on the retirement systems. That report attributes the following to the ERS: "The single most impactful liability control measure has been the withholding of COLAs from current retirees."

So, the state authorities are renegeing on the promises made to current employees and retirees in order to potentially save money in the future. They decided that was more important than ensuring that their former employees have the dignified and comfortable retirement that was promised to them.

Georgia state government is in a very strong financial position. The rainy-day fund is at approximately \$2.6 billion. Revenues are steadily increasing and are expected to do so for the foreseeable future. Now is time for the state to start treating its retirees with the respect they have earned and deserve. The state must provide adequate funds to the ERS to restore the annual 3% across-the-board COLAs, effective July 1, 2019 and each year thereafter. It is the right thing to do!!

Act now! before it's too late and the budget comes out of committee and goes to the House floor. If we can get something put in in the House version of the 2020 Budget it will be easier to keep it in than to get it added in in the Senate.

This needs to be done immediately. **CLICK ON THE TAKE ACTION BUTTON BELOW AND INSERT YOUR MESSAGE!**

Thank you!