

## GSRA 2018 ACTION ALERT 7 – YOUR COLA NEXT WRITING AND CALLING CAMPAIGN

This action alert continues GSRA's most concerted campaign ever of contacting those on whom we rely (legislators, leadership, administration, ERS board members) for COLAs. Two previous alerts requested you to write/call your individual legislators, and to write/call members of the House Retirement Committee. This alert requests that you write/call members of the House Appropriations Committee, which is ending its consideration of the FY 2019 budget.

The Governor and members of the state legislature have stated that this year state revenues are the best in memory, and that was before it was determined that there could be a revenue "windfall" of over one-half billion dollars this year from changes to the federal income tax code. Nonetheless, the Governor's 2019 Budget contains no funds for state employees' or teachers' pay raises or ERS state retirees' COLAs.

Our best chance to get COLA funding at this point is for the House Appropriations Committee to include this funding in the bill it will pass on to the entire House. It is therefore again CRITICAL for you to participate in this alert. We repeat: how much you need and want a COLA should motivate you to participate in ALL of our campaigns.

As a reminder, providing raises to State employees and COLAs to retirees is a good investment and is the fair and right thing to do because:

- State employees and teachers are the basis for the continued health and effectiveness of state government, and their retention and support keep them working hard for all Georgia residents. Most state employees have only received a 3% raise or less over the last 10 years, and they can only get a raise when they get promoted or leave state government. There is no annual step increase in pay for continued successful employment. The average length of stay for current state employees is five years or less because of low pay and reduced retirement benefits.
- State law authorizes adjusting retirees' benefits so as not to lose purchasing power subject to maintaining the actuarial soundness of the retirement system. Before FY 2009, the ERS actuary, the Governor and the General Assembly both funded COLAs and maintained "actuarial soundness" by including the cost of COLAs in the recommended actuarial determined employer contribution (ADEC) and in the appropriation. But this has not been done since, and retirees have not received a cost of living increase since January 2009, nine years ago. While we have been very appreciative of the two benefit adjustments of 3% of the first \$30,000 of our annual benefits, this doesn't come close to the nearly 27% reduction of what our retirement benefits would have been had we received annual COLAs of 3%.

In times of plenty it should not be hard to live up to the promises made in the past to a work force of employees, some now retired, who dedicated their work lives to Georgia's citizens.

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

You should now write and/or call the members of the House Appropriations Committee and ask them to support and vote to appropriate funds for at least a 1% raise for current state employees and a cost of living increase of at least 1% for state retirees to be included in the House version of the 2019 state budget.

The 1% figure for a raise for state employees and a cost of living increase for retirees is not nearly enough to make up for many years of sacrifice, but it is a definite demonstration that our service has not been over-looked. You should send this message IN YOUR OWN WORDS to the members of the House Appropriation Committee shown at the end of this alert. It is not necessary or desirable to include the above background information, but it is necessary to be courteous and respectful. And, since legislative funding for one-time adjustments has originated in the House Appropriations Committee the last two years, you should thank them for helping us with those appropriations.

If, after you send your email, you have the time to call your representative and express your thoughts, that will be good too. You must write your legislators today and throughout the session so that the legislators never doubt that large numbers of voters care about our issues in this election year. Continue to ask yourself: If not now, then when? If not me, then who?

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