

## **GSRA 2018 ACTION ALERT 8 – YOUR COLA NEXT WRITING AND CALLING CAMPAIGN**

The most recent alert suggested you write/call members of the House Appropriations Committee to request a COLA. It has been two weeks and it is time to remind them once again. We have heard from many legislators that they have definitely noted the volume of messages they have received and that we got their attention.

State revenues have been the best in memory. Our best chance to get COLA funding at this point remains 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 included the cost of COLAs in the recommended actuarial determined employer contribution (ADEC) to maintain the system's "actuarial soundness;" the Governor included this amount in his budget recommendation, and the General Assembly likewise funded COLAs in its 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%.
- With the minor exceptions described above, retirees' benefits have NOT been adjusted, and we have lost much purchasing power in the face of over 10% growth in consumer price index (CPI) plus additional medical expenses that accrue to the elderly.

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

**What you as an 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.** 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?**

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING YOUR EMAIL TO LEGISLATORS:**

1. Click on the **ACT NOW** button below.
2. Scroll to the bottom of the page and insert your message in your own words where you see **“GSRA Member: Insert message here.”**
3. Scroll back to the top of the page and click the **SEND** button.