

The Most Hectic Legislative Session Yet?

A VERY Productive One Nonetheless!

By Chuck Freeman

We had a LOT going on this session. This article focuses on the two items of greatest importance to most retirees. These were (1) an addition to the FY 2027 appropriations bill of \$100 million "... to trigger regular and annual ..." COLAs in the same manner as the \$150 million that was first appropriated in FY 2023, and (2) SB 339 which would mandate annual 3% COLAs for us and make GSEPS retirees eligible as well as Old and New Plan members.

The short story: We secured the \$100 million, an INCREDIBLE WIN. SB 339 did not pass, but our effort to advance it earned us many unexpected legislative allies.



Figure 1: GSRA members are grateful for Senator Tillery's efforts.

Now the rest of the story: These two bills were linked together by OCGA 47-20-50, the state law requiring that retirement bills with fiscal impact be concurrently funded in order to become effective. This law was quoted in the last paragraph of SB 339. As we reported last month, ERS's actuary projected the one-time cost for funding that to be about \$4.3 billion, or an amortized cost of roughly \$500 million annually for 20 years; despite the cost, our champions in the Senate Retirement Committee recommended "do pass" by acclamation.

Then came March. SB 339 was stuck in the Rules Committee, which failed to add it to the Senate calendar for a vote. Concurrently, we were hearing from our appropriations friends in both houses that there was a fair-to-good possibility that \$100 million might be appropriated for us in '27, on top of the \$100 million that was previously appropriated in the amended '26 bill. Recognizing that SB 339 would not become law as drafted, we identified two potential amendments that would partially achieve our objectives.

We hoped to amend SB 339 on the Senate floor, but day 28, AKA “crossover day,” arrived on March 6 with the bill still held tightly by the Rules Committee. So now we also had to find an appropriate “vehicle” – i.e., a “germane” bill that had already crossed chambers – that we could either amend or substitute for with SB 339 language.

We were still considering our next moves when Senate Appropriations Chair Blake Tillery reached out to us. He said that he and others were pushing to appropriate \$100 million not just for FY '27, but, as described above, to “be added to the base” for future years as well. He asked whether we would be ready to help his effort if he needed. We, of course, responded with an enthusiastic yes.

In the weeks that followed, we learned that this initiative had strong backing, including from Lt. Governor Jones, Speaker Burns, House Appropriations Chairman Matt Hatchett, and Senate President Pro Tem Walker.

Given this level of support—and the potential for significant, lasting financial gain—we concluded that continuing to push SB 339 in any form might jeopardize the appropriations effort while offering only limited additional benefit. We therefore shifted our full focus to securing the appropriation.

Chairman Tillery remained in close contact throughout the process, and other key supporters made themselves available as needed. And in the closing days, Chairman Tillery spoke emphatically to the Senate Appropriations Committee, to the HB 974 conference committee, and to the Senate chamber, as to the high priority he placed on appropriating the funds to help us overcome our “detrimental loss.” He called our \$100 million “one of the best line items you see.”

Chairman Hatchett also spoke persuasively on our behalf to the House chamber when presenting HB 974.

AND WE SUCCEEDED!

Many members – maybe you? -- including legislative committee participants, officers, board members, and newly engaged law enforcement retirees—contributed to this effort. Our official lobbyist, Chuck Clay, and longtime advocate Jimmie DeLoach devoted countless hours on our behalf. This victory would not have been possible without their dedication. **Well done, everyone!**

One additional note:

SB 285 also passed this session. This bill establishes fees (not state funding) to support enhanced benefits through the Peace Officers Annuity and Benefit Fund (POAB) for our law enforcement members, who advocated strongly for its passage. While POAB operates independently from ERS, one of its board members also serves on the ERS board.

Many Thanks to Many Friends

By Chuck Freeman

This year, the number of supporters and the level of support we received in the General Assembly was so significant that at least the most significant must be noted. We all owe tremendous gratitude to the following:

- Governor Brian Kemp, whose leadership in providing annual appropriations of \$150 million for COLAs starting in FY '23 and for directing a total of \$1.1 BILLION over three years. These initially provided us the first COLAs since 2009 and will now provide us more meaningful COLAs. Governor Kemp also recommended funding for many of our one-time payments including next year.
- Sen. Nan Orrock, our constant champion, for introducing SB 339 last year, continuously reaching out to us, and working hard for the bill's passage ever since.
- Sen. Appropriations Chair Blake Tillery who privately and PUBLICLY made it a priority to have \$100 million appropriated for us "to trigger" COLAs. Chairman Tillery reached out to GSRA multiple times to inform us of the progress of his efforts and to request our help. No legislator has previously initiated contact with us on such important matters.
- Speaker Jon Burns who has given us constant support behind the scenes.
- House Appropriations Chair Matt Hatchett who publicly made it a priority to include \$100 million for us in FY '27.
- Lt. Governor Bert Jones who supported chair Tillery's efforts.
- Senate Appropriations subcommittee Chair Billy Hickman.
- Senate Speaker Pro Tem Larry Walker who was also one of the conference committee members for HB 974.
- Senate Retirement Committee Chair Rick Williams for actively supporting retirees in general and SB 339 in particular. We also thank him for his tirelessly advocating to have money included in the budget for retirees.
- Senate Retirement Committee members Goodman, who moved passage of SB 339, McLaurin, who last year moved to make SB 339 the committee's top priority, Echols, Hufstetler, Mangham, and Davenport, who all voted "do pass" by acclamation.
- Former Senate Retirement Committee Chair Randy Robertson, who posted an extremely moving video for us and lent his support in other ways as well.
- House Retirement Committee Vice Chair Lehman Franklin hosted organizational and other meetings with GSRA leadership and other members.
- House Retirement Committee Chair John Carson and our long-time champion Representative Debbie Buckner, whose doors are always open to us.

Any appreciation you care to express, particularly if you are a constituent of any of the above, will go a long way. We urge you to take the time to do it.

GSRA Presents Legislative Service Award to Senator Williams

By Dan Coffee

On March 3rd, GSRA was honored to award our 2025 Legislative Service Award to Senator Rick Williams. Senator Williams is super supportive of state retirees and active state employees. He serves as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Retirement. He also serves as Secretary of the Senate Committee on Public Safety, as a member of both the Senate Committees on Ethics and Higher Education and the Committee on State and Local Government Operations, and as an ex officio member of the Senate Committee on Rules. Senator Williams is always accessible to our GSRA Legislative Team and helps promote our advocacy on behalf of our members. This past year, he helped spearhead the advancement of our COLA bill through the actuarial study review and successful committee deliberation.



Figure 2: Chuck Clay, Chair Williams with trophy, GSRA Vice President Robert Riddle

Senator Williams was sworn into the Georgia Senate in January 2023 and represents Senate District 25, which includes Baldwin, Butts, Jasper, Jones, and Putnam counties, as well as portions of Bibb and Henry counties. From 2017 to 2022, Senator Williams served in the Georgia House of Representatives, representing District 145, which includes Baldwin County and portions of Putnam County.

Senator Williams co-owns several funeral service businesses, including Williams Funeral Homes of Milledgeville, Williams Crematory of Milledgeville, and Heritage Memorial Park Cemetery. He resides in Milledgeville with his wife, Donna.

ERS Board of Trustees Annual Meeting to be held April 16th

By Dan Coffee

As a reminder, the Annual Meeting of the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) will be held on Thursday, April 16th, 2026, at 10 A.M. in the ERS Board Room, First Floor, Two Northside 75, Atlanta, Georgia. The meeting will also be available by teleconference.

GSRA will have representatives in attendance, and we encourage members to participate in person or by teleconference. At the ERS Annual Meeting, the ERS Actuarial Report for the period ending June 30, 2025, will be released and presented to the ERS Board. On January 21st, before the Joint Appropriations Committees, and again on February 24th, before the Senate Retirement Committee, ERS Executive Director Jim Potvin shared that the funding ratio is "on a very, very positive trajectory". Therefore, we anticipate that this latest actuarial report will have good news on the direction of fund reserves and investment performance.

Also, at the ERS Annual Meeting on April 16th, the Board of Trustees is expected to vote on a COLA increase to begin this July, with our July 31, 2026 benefit payment. Jim Potvin has indicated that we might expect a cost-of-living increase of roughly 2% based on the formula the Board adopted a few years ago. This would be in addition to new funds provided by the General Assembly for COLAs and/or a one-time bonus in Fiscal Year 2027 discussed in this newsletter.

Watch for more information from GSRA to include a link to the teleconference. An agenda package will be available the prior week.

Annual Meetings Schedule:

1. Employees' Retirement System – 10:00 AM
2. Georgia Judicial Retirement System – 11:00 AM
3. Public School Employees Retirement System – 11:15 AM
4. State Employees' Assurance Department – 11:30 AM

If you are available, please plan to attend this important meeting.

Come Celebrate with GSRA At the Annual Meeting!!

By Allan Hill

GSRA arguably had its best year ever during the 2026 Legislative session, thanks to the efforts of our Legislative committee, led by Chuck Freedman and Chuck Clay. Part of that success was due to the more than 70 GSRA members who descended on the Capitol on February 24th for the Senate and House Retirement Committee meetings. We made our presence felt, especially in the Senate, where for the first time the legislators listened, heard us, and supported us.

That day at the Capitol was special in another way as well - the spirit of purpose and unity that those of us who were there felt. That spirit of all, with a common goal, coming together for the good of each other, was palpable. It made an impact on those legislators and helped us achieve our goal.

We have a chance to feel that spirit of unity again at the Annual Meeting. Instead of 70 of us, there will be 250 of us with a common purpose and a common message: that we matter. That we will continue to matter and push for the benefits we have been promised and deserve. Hopefully, we can present our position and show our strength to the gubernatorial candidates whom we will invite to come meet with us.

Based on the results of the recent Annual Meeting survey, we will return to the Robert F. Hatcher Center in Macon for this year's Meeting. We will gather at the venue at Middle Georgia State University in Macon on Monday and Tuesday, October 5-6. As we did last year, we'll begin at 12:30 on Monday and adjourn at 2:30 on Tuesday. We will again reserve blocks of rooms for our members at the nearby hotels.

The Annual Meeting Committee has already begun planning for the workshops. The Elder Care Legal/Financial Affairs and Cybersecurity/AI workshops were the two most popular last year, and we will consider bringing them back. Then we'll start looking for workshops we hope will appeal to our members. Your ideas are most welcome; if you have an idea for a workshop, please let me know at allandhill1@gmail.com.

This year, we plan to have a hot buffet lunch instead of a boxed lunch. As always, you're invited to an opening reception for fun, music, camaraderie, beer, wine, and hors d'oeuvres.

Since this is an election year, we will invite the gubernatorial candidates to address the membership. In some years past, we have been fortunate to have the candidates appear in person; in other years, they have recorded videos specifically for GSRA. This year promises to be a close election, so hopefully, they'll deem our votes important enough to join us. Mark your calendars for October 5-6, 2026, at the Robert F. Hatcher Center on the campus of Middle Georgia State University. We are excited about what we think will be another fun, successful Annual Meeting and about building on the spirit of unity we felt at the Day at the Capitol.

AMBA/GSRA Webinars

By Allan Hill

GSRA and AMBA offer monthly webinars that provide members with a wide range of important information, including financial, health, travel, recreational, lifestyle, and safety topics. The webinars are held on the third Wednesday of every month at 10:00 A.M., except in December, when it's the first Wednesday. All webinars are free to join, but registration is required.

Join us for the next webinar on April 15, 2026, for "Living Safe and Independent at Home" with your host Lexie Mowery of AMBA. All members will receive an email from "GSRA Webinar" in early April with details and instructions on registering.

Looking ahead, the May 20, 2026, webinar will be "Ready, Set, Go: Safe and Smart Summer Travel."

If you've missed any of the previous webinars, you can find recordings of all of them on the GSRA homepage at www.mygsra.com. See you at 10:00 on April 15!



From the Banks of the Chattahoochee River

By Judy Bryson

Dear GSRA Members,

Although we are nearing the end of the current legislative session, it is more important than ever for state retirees to hold onto perseverance and optimism. This time of year, as spring unfolds, reminds us that renewal and growth are possible, both in nature and in advocacy. While it is easy to feel discouraged, especially after the disappointment of SB 339 not crossing over, this season is far from over. There are still opportunities to achieve the outcomes we have been working toward.

The push for guaranteed three (3) percent COLAs remains a top priority. Advocates are actively working to insert that language into other bills, determined to keep the conversation alive. At the same time, the fight for budget allocations that support state retirees is ongoing, with every effort being made to secure the funds you deserve.

It is possible we may see a one-time payment as well as progress on COLA dollars. Nothing is set in stone yet, but all options are on the table as leaders continue negotiations. This session has proven to be highly political, with shifting alliances and heated debates, but that is even more reason to keep pushing forward.

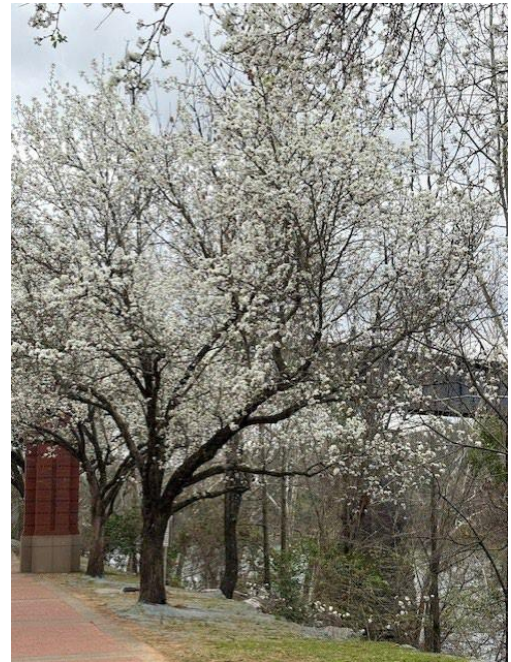
Even though setbacks can sting, they should not stop us from staying engaged. Your voice matters, and every bit of advocacy helps move the needle. Do not give up, there is still a chance to see positive change for state retirees this year.

Let's stay hopeful, stay connected, and continue to support each other.

Together, we can be effective and ensure that state retiree needs remain a priority in the legislative process. Thank you for your perseverance and commitment!

Take Care,

Judy



Local GSRA Chapter News

East Metro Chapter

East Metro Chapter met on March 6th at the First Baptist Church Annex, Covington, Georgia. The meeting was presided over by President David Taylor. Lunch was from Chick-fil-A and served by Sheila Ricks, chapter member. There were twenty-five members present and one guest, invited by a member who signed up for membership.

Our guest speaker was Nathan Coflin, who serves as the statewide team leader in Georgia for the federal government funded Senior Medicare Patrol Program (SMP). This program empowers and assists Medicare beneficiaries to prevent healthcare fraud, errors, and abuse. There are offices in every state that serve beneficiaries of all ages, family members, and caregivers.

Mr. Coflin stated that Medicare loses \$60B each year due to fraud, errors, and abuse. You can contact SMP if you think fraud, errors, or abuse have already occurred. SMP suggests reviewing your Medicare statements for errors, such as unrecognized charges or duplicate billing. The contact number in Georgia is 877-272-8720.



Figure 3: Guest speaker Nathan Coflin presented information about the Senior Medicare Patrol Program.

After Mr. Coflin finished his presentation, President Taylor drew tickets and awarded six door prizes, including a donation of several boxes of Girl Scout cookies from a member.



Newsletter

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February 2026 New GSRA Members, Welcome!

Name	County	Name	County
Deborah Andrews	Richmond	John Brown	Bartow
Denise Brown	Out of State	Raphael Brumbeloe	Pike
Sylvester Burton	Jefferson	Matt Carter	Newton
Larry Collins	Tattnall	Glyn Corbitt	Bibb
Ruth Fleming	Fulton	Terry Heggs	Chatham
Nancy Hunnewell	Effingham	LaMarva Ivory	Dekalb
Anita Mashburn	Bartow	Hazel McIver	Coffee
Rega McIver	Coffee	Jayanti Mistry	Forsyth
Vivian Murray	Tift	Judy Reddick	Thomas
Deborah Simmons	Chatham	Francis Sisk II	Fulton
Susan Thompson	Upson		

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