



Newsletter

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Money for COLAs Not in Governor's 2026 Budget

By Chuck Freedman

CORRECTION: GSRA has received additional information regarding the Governor's budget recommendation for a supplemental payment to ERSGA retirees. The Governor is recommending the Legislature appropriate \$26.75 million for one-time payment adjustment in the FY 26 budget.

Governor Kemp released his recommended amended FY 2025 and general FY 2026 “big” budgets. Neither includes new money for COLAs or one-time adjustments. However, the governor has included a second consecutive \$500 million to be added to the ERS pension fund in his amended FY '25 recommendations.

According to ERSGA Executive Director Jim Potvin, this will add about 2.5% to the funds' percentage of funded liabilities, moving from 72% to between 75% and 76% funded. This will help bolster the pension system's financial soundness, which is a good thing in the long run. The most recent actuarial analysis, as of June 30, 2023, had a funding ratio of 72.0% for the Employees Retirement System, based on the actuarial value of system assets. Unfortunately, this large addition to the pension fund will not benefit ERS retirees for the next several years and will provide an unknown limited benefit thereafter.

The governor and ERSGA ERS continue to honor their 2023 commitment for \$150 million to be added annually to the actuarially determined employer contribution (ADEC), which should provide for an average annual COLA of about 1%. The three COLAs awarded so far total 2.25% for an average of 0.75%. For the last several years, the General Assembly has added \$26.75 million, which has provided one-time adjustments up to a maximum of \$531 and \$569. We do not know if the General Assembly will continue the practice this year. In the near term, we are working with members of the General Assembly to get additional funds included in the FY 2026 budget for a COLA increase and/or another one-time adjustment.

The 2025 session has started slowly, with sessions being canceled for several days due to inclement weather. Few bills have been introduced, and only two impact us. HB 78 by Rep. Franklin and SB 23 by Sen. Albers would raise the pension fund investments placed in alternative investments from 5% to 10%. Currently, between 3.5% and 4% of the investment portfolio is invested in alternative investments, which include investments such as private equity.



Figure 1: GSRA members are pictured with Chairman John Carson and Vice Chairman Lehman Franklin of the House Retirement Committee and Senators Nan Orrock and Gail Davenport of the Senate Retirement Committee.

GSRA hosted lunch for members of both retirement committees before their joint meeting on Jan. 28. Over 20 GSRA members attended this meet-and-greet opportunity. Both chairs were present, and GSRA was invited to address the committee in addition to the executive directors of TRS and ERS. Due to extended questioning of TRS director Evans, GSRA representatives Chuck Clay and Chuck Freedman were left about 6 1/2 minutes before the committee had to adjourn to allow the next scheduled meeting to begin. Nonetheless, we were gratified to be invited to speak and made the best use of the time allotted that we could. You can view the entire committee's session at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOP5uVyyLgw>. Director Potvin's remarks begin at 40:45 of the video. GSRA's comments start at 55:40.



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ERSGA New Secure Sign-On

By Allan Hill with ERSGA Contributors - Danielle Templeton and Susan Anderson

ERSGA required everyone signing into their ERSGA account to re-register using the Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) process. MFA requires both a password and a second step, such as a code sent to you via text or phone call. As our good friend Danielle Templeton of ERSGA explained in the July GSRA newsletter, MFA adds an extra level of security to your ERSGA account, which is something we can all appreciate these days!

I have received several inquiries from my chapter members about this process, and I know there have been questions about it from members throughout the state. The purpose of this article is to share my experience, hoping it will make it easier and less stressful for those who have yet to go through this process.

I signed on to the ERSGA website shortly after receiving my first payment of the new year, and was directed to register using the MFA process. The first step required my Social Security number. Since ERSGA pays us a benefit and issues a tax form (1099R) every year, this is how they identify members.

The second step required my date of birth, for which I was presented a calendar with the current month. I typed in my birthday, which I didn't think was accepted. I then scrolled back month by month, over 800 months, to find my birth month. I later discovered this was unnecessary, as the system would have properly defaulted had I correctly typed in mm/dd/yyyy and hit enter; no scrolling would have been necessary. I assume (as I usually do) user error at this step.

The third step that gave me pause was the field for "Employer." That field is prepopulated with a number of options, one of which will be the final employer shown on your ERS records. It turns out that my final employer was one to which I was assigned strictly for administrative/bookkeeping purposes, one for whom I had never actually worked. You may have to look for the last ERSGA employer you received a W2 from. Once I finally had that resolved, I had to enter my latest net pension payment amount.

The next step was receiving a Confirmation Email and letter. The Confirmation Email (the subject matter was ERSGA Web Profile Reset), confirmed that I had started the re-registration process and needed to complete the final step. ERSGA also sent me a letter via US Mail confirming I had started the re-registration process.

At this point you might have to complete an Attestation Form. The system gave me the option of either printing the form myself (which I did) or having it mailed to me via US Mail. I had to sign and have the signature notarized, then mail it back to ERS via US Mail with a copy of a valid government issued ID, such as a driver's license. I am now waiting for an email from ERSGA confirming my Attestation has been approved and I'm ready to move on to the final step in the process.

All of the above steps were necessary to confirm my identity. This is part of the security implemented by ERSGA to ensure it is really me registering for my online account. The final step will be where I "opt-in" to MFA, receiving confirmation of my opt-in by either Voice or Text, then I request a one-time code be sent to me by either Voice or Text.



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Once I enter that one-time code, I am in my ERSGA online account. Requesting the one-time code and entering it will be required every time I log in going forward.

If you're having problems registering, or re-registering, ERSGA has Account Access instructions available below the Register button on their website: ers.ga.gov. If that doesn't help, give ERSGA a call for assistance at 404-350-6300.

While going through the MFA process may take a little extra time, it's well worth it to safeguard your ERSGA account and ensure your personal and retirement information stays secure in an increasingly digital world.

The Social Security Fairness Act

By Allan Hill

Recently, many of us saw media reports like this one from the AJC: “[On December 29, 2024], President Biden signed into law a measure [known as the Social Security Fairness Act] that [boosts Social Security payments](#) for current and former public employees, affecting [nearly 3 million people](#) who receive pensions from their time as teachers, firefighters, police officers and in other public service jobs... The bill rescinds two provisions — the [Windfall Elimination Provision](#) and the [Government Pension Offset](#) — that [limit Social Security benefits](#) for recipients if they get retirement payments from other sources, including public retirement programs from a state or local government...[The law would] boost monthly payments to the affected beneficiaries by an average of \$360 by December 2025. Upon reading this, we thought, hey, I get retirement from the state government, so will my Social Security payment get a boost of \$360 a month?

What the media reports did not explain is that the new law affects those government employees who did not pay Social Security payroll taxes during their employment. The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) reduced benefits for workers with one job that did not withhold Social Security taxes and another that did. For example, people who worked for the Post Office paid into the Civil Service pension program but did not pay into Social Security. If they had other employment (in addition to their Post Office job) for which they paid into Social Security, upon retirement, their Social Security benefits were reduced because of the Windfall Elimination Provision. The new law would undo the Windfall Elimination Provision and restore their Social Security benefits to their full entitlement.

While working for the State, all employees paid Social Security payroll taxes, meaning that the Social Security Fairness Act does not affect ERS retirees. As exciting as the news sounded on the first reading, our Social Security benefits will not get a boost. We are already receiving our full Social Security benefits.



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From the Banks of the Chattahoochee River

By Judy Bryson

Greetings GSRA Members:

As the New Year has gotten off to an unusually frigid start, there has been much time for reflection. I am both humbled and honored to serve as your President. Sharing your many years of service to Georgia, I pledge to advocate strongly for your health insurance benefits, reasonable COLA increases, and a vibrant pension fund to ensure strong future benefits. All are well deserved and reflect your dedication to our state through many years of service.

The leadership provided by Robert Riddle and outgoing Board members has well-positioned the new GSRA leadership to begin this year with a clear focus on our agenda. While I came home to Columbus some years ago, most of my career was spent in Atlanta, giving me a broad perspective and appreciation for how to communicate with the state's leadership. Engagement with the Governor's Office, legislators, and relevant state agencies must be continuous and clear. Our voice must always be present and understood.

Now that the legislative session is upon us, your Association's leadership will be hard at work. Given what all of you have done for the state, legislators need to know who we are and what we stand for. As Sadie Rogers says, "We need to keep trying to be heard anyway. We spend too much time fretting over making sure we are nice." Our advocacy will be respectful yet clear and firm.

The work does not just happen in Atlanta. Our voice will be strengthened with a larger membership base. In the months ahead, I will be actively involved in current local chapters and helping to establish new chapters. Our message needs to be heard not only at the Capitol but in communities across the state; for this, we need your help. New initiatives will focus on growing membership, sharing best practices across chapters, and better understanding existing and new resources. Local chapters must show value within their area to attract new members and be forums to inform and share ideas.

Your thoughts are encouraged and always appreciated. I look forward to working with all of you, as we strive to meet our goals over the coming year.

Judy





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Local GSRA Chapter News

Coosa Valley Chapter

The Coosa Valley Chapter met on Tuesday, January 15th, for its first meeting of the year. Ron Gross led the meeting, volunteering to assist Chapter President Dinah Brock with her presidential duties. There were 15 members in attendance.

Lindsey and Deron Bellcase were guest speakers. They own SHIFT Therapy & Wellness, a small business focused on getting and keeping you moving. They are in Rome and provide one-on-one, individualized physical and occupational therapy sessions. In the meeting, they focused on the needs of seniors, including maintaining balance, strength, mobility, and flexibility. It was an excellent presentation, both informative and interesting.

Jan Hardeman, Outreach Director, reported that from October through December 2024, she sent out 6 postcards to new retirees, inviting them to join the Coosa Valley Chapter and attend the next meeting.

Marlene Autrey gave an update on GSRA activities, including plans to visit the Capital on 1/28/2025 for a luncheon and attend the Legislators' Retirement Committee meeting. She also reported that the 2025 GSRA Annual Meeting will be held in Macon at the same location as last year.

The winners of the door prizes were Dinah Crosby and Marlene Autry.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 15th, with new GSRA President Judy Bryson being the guest speaker.

CSRA-GSRA Chapter

Happy New Year to all, and welcome to our new chapter president, Barbara Lariscy. Due to the threat of a severe winter storm, the January meeting of the CSRA-GSRA chapter was canceled. The next meeting will be held on February 18 at 1 pm at a new location, the Columbia County Health Department, 1930 William Few Parkway, Grovetown. A representative from Silver Sneakers will be the speaker. Please join us for fellowship, refreshments, and hopefully valuable information for a healthier you in the coming year.

ABC Chapter

ABC Chapter met on January 20, 2025, at the Covered Wagon in Douglas, Georgia. Updates were provided on the recent GSRA board meeting and the schedule of upcoming ABC Chapter meetings for 2025.



Figure 2: The ABC GSRA Chapter members enjoyed lunch and fellowship at their January meeting.

Everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch and fellowship. Our next chapter meeting will be April 21, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. at Covered Wagon in Douglas, Georgia.

Tri-County Chapter

The Tri-County Chapter held its first quarterly meeting of 2025 on January 27th at Doodlum's Barbecue & Fruit Stand in Woodbury with thirty (30) members in attendance. Robin Reid from the Alzheimer's Association shared information about Alzheimer's and dementia, including risk factors, stages of Alzheimer's, and support available to caregivers.



Figure 3: Thirty members of the Tri-County Chapter enjoyed a presentation by Robin Reid from the Alzheimer's Association.

Everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch and fellowship. The next chapter meeting is planned for Monday, April 28th at Doodlum's Barbecue Restaurant in Woodbury.

East Metro Chapter

The East Metro Chapter met on Monday, January 27, at the First Baptist Church Annex in Covington. Thirty-eight members and the guest speaker attended. As lunch was prepared and everyone signed in, members socialized and renewed acquaintances. President David Taylor then welcomed and invited everyone for lunch.

After lunch, President Taylor introduced the guest speaker, Nathan Coflin, Georgia Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Team Lead/Community Outreach Specialist. Mr. Coflin explained his organization's purpose and how it can help seniors. SMP's primary objective is to prevent Medicare Fraud. The SMP "assists Medicare beneficiaries to prevent health care fraud, errors, and abuse." He gave an engaging presentation on how fraudsters and scammers target seniors and how to prevent, detect, and report Medicare fraud. The group was very receptive to this topic and the overall presentation, as demonstrated by audience participation. Several participants relayed their hacking, scamming, or fraud experience, resulting in more discussion. This was very timely and valuable information, including a Help Line number where individuals can seek immediate attention or investigation and potential referral to the OIG. Mr. Coflin held a door prize drawing and awarded a foldable stadium seat to the winner. More information is available at stopmedicarefraud.org or advisewell.org. Mr. Coflin is available to speak to other groups and organizations. His contact information is ncoflin@advisewell.org.



Figure 4: SMP's Nathan Cofer provided insightful information on how to avoid and report medicare fraud.

After the presentation, President Taylor thanked Sylvia Sellars for two delicious homemade desserts and Teresa Belcher for a delicious dessert and door prizes. He then briefly discussed the work of GSRA leadership and the upcoming Legislative Lunch with key legislators and other officials. The Governor's Budget again includes \$500M to ERS. He noted the hard work GSRA is doing, much of which is behind-the-scenes work often unknown to many members. He especially complimented Kevin Burke, GSRA's IT expert, who volunteers many hours weekly to manage, negotiate, and communicate, thereby keeping our systems operating effectively.

Upon closing, Present Taylor thanked everyone for attending and awarded several nice door prizes.



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Welcome New Members!

Name	County	Name	County
Fred Clay	Worth	Caroline Day	Tift
Yvette Denison	Wayne	Wesley Dunn	Cobb
Kathy Eubanks	Talbot	Joachim Ferrero	Cobb
Steve Friedman	Dekalb	Daphne Harrison	Douglas
Jerlena Hurley	Tift	John Hurst	Cobb
Angela Ingram	Cobb	Patricia D Johnson	Tift
Flozella Jones	Worth	Diane Terrell	Tift
June Van Brackle	Tift	Mary Wareham	Hall
Sylvia Williams	Richmond	Gwendolyn Y	Henry



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