

## Advocating for SB 339: A Critical Moment for Georgia State Retirees

By Chuck Freedman

February 24, 2026, was a long and productive day at the Georgia State Capitol for the Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA) and the retired Georgia law enforcement community. Our group of about 75 met at 10:00 a.m. with several legislative members. We then gathered on the Capitol's south steps, where GSRA vice president Robert Riddle, retired GBI inspector Jim Covington, and retired DNR Law Enforcement Col. Eddie Henderson read statements for the media. (Mr. Riddle's statement and the statement read by Inspector Covington and Col. Henderson follow this article)

After lunch, the group packed the Senate Retirement Committee meeting three deep, standing room only. The committee heard from ERS Director Jim Potvin and from an impassioned GSRA Lobbyist, Chuck Clay. Thanks to our collective effort, the eight members present voted **SB 339 "Do Pass"** by acclamation. We are greatly indebted to all members, starting with the author of our bill, Senator Nan Orrock, Chairman Rick Williams, who championed it into the meeting, Sen. Russ Goodman, who spoke eloquently in favor of it and moved for its passage, and Senators McLaurin, Hufstetler, Davenport, Echols, and Mangham.



Figure 1: Chuck Freedman, Senator Orrock, and Dan Coffee at the Senate Retirement Committee meeting.

Sen. Orrock introduced SB 339 at the request of GSRA. The bill would require annual 3% COLAs for eligible retirees and mandate that ALL moneys appropriated for COLAs – including those already in the ADEC – would be paid to retirees as

COLAs. Unfortunately, it is very costly. According to an actuary, it would cost \$500 million per year for 20 years or \$4.3 billion if was paid in full at once. The bill now moves to the Senate Rules Committee for consideration and potential placement on the Senate calendar for a full Senate vote. As you know, the legislative process can be lengthy and complex, so continued advocacy is essential at every stage.



Figure 2: The Senate Retirement Committee voted for SB 339 by acclamation, including Senators Echols, Hufstetler, McLaurin, Admin Jackson, Chairman Williams, Senators Goodman, Orrock, Mangham, and Davenport.

The final event was a very emotional joint House and Senate Retirement Committees meeting conducted by House Chairman John Carson. The purpose was for the legislators to hear retired state law enforcement officers relate their experiences from both their careers and their retirements. Col. Henderson made some opening remarks that provided context for those who followed. Danny Blevins, Sammy Young, Bert Davis, Daryl Worth, and Damon Winters shared their touching stories. The testimonies were wrapped up by retired DPS Commissioner and current state representative, Col. Bill Hitchens.



Figure 3: Col Eddie Henderson testified at the Joint Committee meeting.

During the day, Col. Henderson was interviewed by WSB radio. Here is the link to that interview.

<https://www.wsbradio.com/news/local/push-under-gold-dome-seeks-regular-cost-of-living-increases-state-retirees/WMVXDNWAFJED5MJUG2W4JFWCAM/>

## Why This Moment Is Critical

“Crossover Day”—the final day a bill can pass one chamber and still be considered by the other—is March 6. It is important that members of the Senate Rules Committee act quickly to advance SB 339.



Figure 4: GSRA and Georgia Law Enforcement retirees representing all state retirees at the Georgia Capitol on February 24, 2026.

## **Georgia State Law Enforcement COLA Fact Sheet**

**By Inspector Covington and Col. Eddie Henderson**

Inspector Covington and Col. Henderson provided the following COLA Fact Sheet on February 24, 2026

- State Employees hired prior to 2009 were advised their employee benefits included an annual 3 percent COLA: two 1 ½ percent increases.
- For the past 17 years, they have had virtually no cost-of-living adjustments and feel essentially abandoned by our retirement system. During these 17 years their purchasing power has been decreased by over one third.
- We thank the Governor and General Assembly for the infusion of a total of one billion in funding in the past two years, and the prefunding of COLAs by the legislature since FY 2023.
- In January, ERS Executive Director Jim Potvin told joint House and Senate Appropriation Committees that he projects ERS to have a 100% funded ratio by 2030. Because of the COLA formula, retirees still would not have assurance of a 3% COLA.
- Currently, House and Senate Appropriation Committees have approved \$100 million for ERS. ERS Executive Director Jim Potvin told the ERS board on February 19, 2026 these unexpected funds will go to minimally reduce fund liability. All retirees and some Legislators wanted these funds to go directly toward retiree's FY27 COLAs without regard to the ERS COLA formula.
- The lack of COLAs is more egregious when considering that Georgia has had extraordinary surplus revenue. The Revenue Shortfall Reserve is at its legal cap since FY21. Undesignated reserves, which can be used to fund ERS, are extremely high; \$9.1 billion in FY25.
- Here are a few notations on inflation: From 2020 to 2024 groceries are up 30% per the Consumer Price Index. The trend continues. According to Lending Tree, homeowner insurance is up 36% in Georgia since 2019. According to the nation's leading insurance comparison site, auto insurance has increased by 78% in the past 10 years. Loss of purchasing power, which OCGA 47-2-29 states is to be "essentially" maintained, has been even greater. This is because aging individuals are stricken with aging-related expenses that they do not experience when younger.
- Due to LE career stressors and related factors, average life expectancy of LE officers is 57. Compared to age 79 in the general population (22 years). \*\* Sigma Tactical Wellness
- Studies indicate LE officers are roughly 54% more likely to die by suicide than civilians. Data from 2016 to 2022 shows an average of 180+ officer suicides annually, often exceeding the number of officers killed in the line of duty. \*\*CNA - Center for Naval Analysis

- An attorney representing certain ERS retirees stated, "After having given the best years of their lives to the State of Georgia, most of these individuals are now living on fixed incomes and are suffering a devastating erosion of their purchasing power caused by record high inflation. The stresses associated with economic hardships can't help but exacerbate the above health factors.
- While undesignated surplus monies are available, we ask that the work continue to fund ERS to a level in which you can direct ERS to reinstate COLAs that were intended to ensure financial stability and dignity of Georgia State Employees in their aging years.

## State Retirees Have Been Left Behind

By Robert Riddle

Information from the following rally call was presented at the Georgia State Capitol at the press conference:

Friends, retirees, families, and supporters, we are gathered because Georgia's state retirees have waited long enough. Eighteen years is too long. The loss is too great. And the silence from our leaders has gone on far too long. Let's say this plainly:

### **Georgia state retirees have been left behind.**

Before 2008, retirees received a predictable 3% annual COLA — 1.5% in January and 1.5% in July. That wasn't a gift. It was a promise. It was part of the retirement system that employees counted on when they chose a career in public service. But in 2008, during the recession, those COLAs were suspended. And here's the truth that every Georgian deserves to hear:

Teachers kept their COLAs. University retirees kept their COLAs. But state retirees — the corrections officers, the caseworkers, the public safety staff, the administrative workers who kept this state running — were the only group who never got theirs back.

Since then, inflation has risen more than 40%. In eighteen years, retirees have received a total of 2.75% in COLAs. **That's not a gap — that's a chasm.**

Yes, the state handed out one-time payments. Retirees are grateful for every dollar. But let's be honest: One-time payments don't raise the pension. They don't compound. They don't protect anyone from inflation. They disappear — and the next month, retirees are right back where they started.

**Add every one-time payment together — all ten years of them — and it totals at most \$8,110.55. But retirees have lost far more than that in purchasing power every single year.**



# Newsletter

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Let me put this in real numbers: A retiree with a \$30,000 pension in 2008 should be earning about \$51,000 today if the traditional COLAs had continued. Instead, they're earning about \$30,800. That's a loss of more than \$20,000 every year, and it keeps growing.

**This is not just math. This is groceries. This is medication. This is electricity. This is rent. This is dignity.**

Most state retirees earn under \$40,000. These are not wealthy people. These are the people who staffed our prisons, protected our children, kept our agencies running, and held this state together.

**They did their part. They kept their promise. And now it's time for the State of Georgia to keep its promise to them.**

We are here today to say: **Enough is enough. Eighteen years is enough. Falling 37% behind inflation is enough.**

Watching other state retirees receive COLAs while state employees are left behind is enough.

**Georgia is strong. Georgia is prosperous. Georgia has the resources.**

What we need now is the political will to do what is right.

We are calling on the Governor. We are calling on the General Assembly. We are calling on every elected official who claims to support public servants. Restore meaningful, predictable COLAs.

**Not someday. Not eventually. Now.**

Because retirees cannot wait another year. They cannot absorb another price increase. They cannot continue losing ground while the state looks the other way. This is a matter of fairness. This is a matter of dignity. This is about keeping promises to the people who kept Georgia running. And we will not stop raising our voices until justice is done.

## **GSRA Announces 2026 Annual Meeting Save the Dates, October 5-6, 2026**

**By Allan Hill**

A resounding 80% of the respondents to last month's Annual Meeting survey said they wanted to return to the Robert F. Hatcher Center in Macon for this year's Meeting, so that's what we'll do. 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 will begin planning for workshops in the very near future. The Elder Care Legal/Financial Affairs and the Cybersecurity/AI workshops were the two most popular workshops last year, and we will look at bringing those back. Then we'll start looking for some first-time workshops that 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 [allandhill@gmail.com](mailto:allandhill@gmail.com).

This year, we plan to serve a hot buffet lunch instead of boxed lunches. 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.

So mark your calendars. October 5-6, 2026, at the Robert F. Hatcher Center on the campus of Middle Georgia State University. We are excited for what we think will be another fun, successful Annual Meeting.

## **AMBA/GSRA Webinars**

The monthly AMBA/GSRA webinars offer members helpful information on finances, health, travel, lifestyle, and safety. Sessions are held every third Wednesday at 10:00 A.M., except in December, when the webinar takes place on the first Wednesday. All webinars are free, but registration is required.

Our next webinar is on March 18, 2026: "Guarding Your Nest Egg: Smarter Ways to Protect Your Savings," hosted by Lexie Mowery of AMBA. Watch for an email from "GSRA Webinar" in early March with registration details.

The April 15th webinar will be "Living Safe and Independent at Home."

Recordings of all past webinars are available at [www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com).

See you at 10:00 A.M. on March 18th!

## From the Banks of the Chattahoochee River

By Judy Bryson

Dear GSRA Members,

On February 24, 2026, our annual GSRA Day at the State Capitol brought together retirees and advocates from across Georgia, united in purpose and hope. The presence of GSRA members from all corners of the state added powerful testimony to our cause. Their testimony underscored the urgent need for action. Together, we made clear that restoring the COLA is not just a financial necessity, but a matter of fairness and honoring the promises made to those who dedicated their careers to serving Georgia.

Our advocacy resonated. Following our testimony and the press conference, the Senate Retirement Committee voted to advance Senate Bill 339, moving it forward to Senate Rules and then on to the full Senate for a vote. This step is essential to bring back the inflation protection promised to retirees, helping to guarantee their dignity and stable living conditions during retirement.

On behalf of the GSRA, I want to thank every member who made their voice heard on GSRA Day. Your participation, the experiences you shared, and your dedication have made a meaningful impact. As we look ahead to the Senate vote, let us continue to stand together and advocate for the respect and security our retirees have earned.

Take Care,

*Judy*



## Local GSRA Chapter News

### ABC of Douglas Chapter

ABC of Douglas held its meeting on January 19, 2026, at the Covered Wagon in Douglas, Georgia. The guest speaker was Debbie Scarborough of AMBA. She discussed insurance plans and Medicare issues.



Figure 5: The ABC of Douglas chapter members enjoyed a presentation by Debbie Scarborough of AMBA.

The next chapter meeting is planned for April 20, 2026.

### Columbus/West Georgia Chapter

The Columbus/West Georgia chapter held its quarterly meeting on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at the Food Mill Café and Eatery, a Columbus, Georgia-based non-profit social enterprise that combats food insecurity through various programs, including a community café, mobile market, cooking classes, and a shared commercial kitchen for food entrepreneurs. Olivia Amos, Executive Director, and Kasey Trombley, Chief Operating Officer, both provided an overview of their programs.



Figure 6: The Columbus Chapter enjoyed an interesting overview of the Food Mill Café and Eatery non-profit, and the programs it offers.

Our other guest speaker, Robert Riddle, provided an in-depth review of pending legislation, GSRA Day at the Capital and GSRA's Action Alerts.



Figure 7: Pictured are the special guests Olivia Amos, Kasey Trombley, and Robert Riddle along with GSRA President Judy Bryson, Cynthia Tharp, and Gloria Coker.

There were approximately 25 in attendance. Our next quarterly meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2026.

## CSRA-GSRA Chapter

The CSRA-GSRA Chapter met on February 17, 2026, at the Columbia County Health Department in Grovetown, GA. The speaker was Dr. Jeffery Morris, Program Director with Augusta University's Computer and Cyber Sciences. Dr. Morris discussed the "Internet of Things," devices that we connect to the internet and forget about, which can be hacked and used for criminal enterprises. He also discussed phishing and how it is easier for the criminal to hack the human, rather than the software or hardware, whether by email, text, or phone call. Dr. Morris' tips to stay safe included letting unknown callers go to voicemail, never sharing personal information, keeping tech updated, and opening your own link to an account to check for any problems. He stated that looking at the email sender's address is not the fix it used to be as the scammers are good at making it look legitimate.

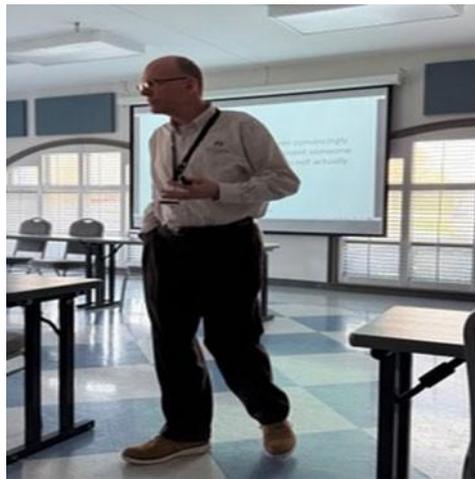


Figure 8: The CSRA-GSRA chapter met on February 17<sup>th</sup> with guest speaker Dr Jeffery Morris.

President Barbara Lariscy encouraged the group to respond to the action alerts that were recently sent out. It was decided that a meeting would not be held in March, and the next meeting will be on April 21, 2026, at 1 pm at the Columbia County Health Department, 1930 William Few Parkway, Grovetown. All are invited to attend.



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[www.MyGSRA.com](http://www.MyGSRA.com)

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## January 2026 New GSRA Members, Welcome!

Name	County	Name	County
Anita Folsome	Chatham	Michael Ryan	Chatham
William Akins	Cherokee	Randall Faulkner	Coweta
Gwendolyn Hurston	Dekalb	Ava Jordan	Fayette
Hilary Williams	Fulton	Margaret Dawe	Fulton
Sharon Angel	Henry	Charles Moss	Henry
Dana Hager	Lee	Jonna West	Newton
William Callaway	Oconee	Mary Peek	Terrell

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