

## **GSRA MEETS WITH ERS DIRECTOR JIM POTVIN AND NEW ERS BOARD CHAIR HOMER BRYSON**

By Chuck Freedman

As reported in our last newsletter, ERS Director Jim Potvin had offered GSRA the opportunity to provide input into how the \$26.75 million appropriated for “annual adjustments” in FY ‘24 would be distributed to ERS retirees. Director Potvin met for that purpose with GSRA members Beverly Littlefield, Jim Sommerville, Maggie Williams and Chuck Freedman on July 5. Overall, GSRA advocated for the maximum amount possible to be distributed in a manner to best benefit as many members as possible as soon as possible. Potvin told us that we should also consider how best to budget for and preserve the funding for the adjustment over the longest period of time. We discussed several options. Potvin agreed to determine the impact of these options on retirees receiving various benefits amounts. We look forward to receiving this information to enable us to make better recommendations.

On July 10 GSRA members met with Director Potvin and new ERS board chair Homer Bryson. Beverly Littlefield, Joseph Drolet, Chuck Clay, Deupree Yancey and Chuck Freedman participated.

GSRA thanked Potvin for including us in determining how best to distribute the \$26.75 million for FY '24 adjustments. We expressed our basic objectives for that money. We also discussed our objective to obtain as much of the estimated \$5 billion surplus as possible to increase funding for our prefunded COLAs. Potvin and Bryson informed us as to the sentiments of leaders in both legislative houses. Mr. Potvin said he won't turn down any offered money.

GSRA also requested that the board make under age 45 disability members eligible for all adjustments. Mr. Bryson said that he needs to know how many such members there are and the impact on the pension fund of making these members eligible. He agreed to consider our request.

We advocated for opening board meetings to public attendance and for conducting the meetings similar to how legislative committee meetings are conducted – with a defined time allotted for public comment, and for the meetings' video recordings and materials to be maintained in an archive available to the public. We requested these archives be maintained retroactively to 2010 where possible. Mr. Bryson agreed to consider these requests and that at least the matter of public attendance will be considered at the board's August meeting.

Overall, the meetings went as well as we expected. Exactly how well will depend on ERS actions after its “consideration.”



# Newsletter

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## Make your plans today for the 2023 GSRA Annual Meeting

By Allan Hill

If you are like me, procrastination is part of your life. Now that I'm retired, I can easily convince myself that I can do it tomorrow because, well, I have nothing else to do tomorrow! But life still has deadlines, and the deadline for registering for the Annual Meeting is fast approaching. Registration for this year's Annual Meeting is \$50 (more than last year, because the price of food has gone up!) if you register before September 9, but it rises to \$65 after that. Plus, in order to get the special \$169 rate at our host hotel, the Columbus Marriott, you must reserve your room by September 8. So don't delay! Make your plans today for the 2023 GSRA Annual Meeting.

Please join us on October 9-10, 2023 for this year's Annual Meeting. We will gather in Columbus, GA at the Historic Iron Works in the Columbus Convention Center. Our host hotel is the Columbus Marriott, which is directly across the street from the Convention Center. As usual, we'll have speakers from ERS and SHBP to give us updates for the coming year, a variety of workshops both informative and fun, and an opening night reception with drinks and appetizers. Downtown Columbus offers a number of dining options within walking distance. Take this opportunity to renew past friendships with former co-workers and to make new friendships with your fellow GSRA members.

To register for the Annual Meeting online, click here: <https://gsra.memberclicks.net/2023-annual-meeting-registration#!/>

To register by mail, click here:

<https://gsra.memberclicks.net/assets/documents/GSRA%20Registration%20Form%20-%20Annual%20Meeting%20Columbus%20GA%20Oct%209-10%202023%20Updated%20%20Kip.pdf>

To make reservations at the Columbus Marriott, click here: <https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1681154462219&key=GRP&app=resvlinkour>

GSRA needs your support as we continue our fight for the benefits that were promised to us. A strong showing in Columbus is an important step in our ongoing struggle. Be there, get involved, voice your opinion, ask questions, and show your support!

Help enrich our voice and grow our support. Don't let those that we worked for so long continue to divide and fragment us so our concerns go overlooked and appear unneeded of their attention.

## GSRA Meets with State Health Benefit Plan Management

By B.J. Bennett

GSRA leaders met with staff of the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) to discuss upcoming Plan issues, including changes in options for the upcoming January 1, 2024. Deputy Executive Director (SHBP) Cathy Craven and Director of Health Plan Management Kaleema Thomas hosted the meeting with President Beverly Littlefield and other GSRA Board Members.

Director Craven announced that the Department of Community Health (DCH) has a new Commissioner, Russell Carlson who is very supportive of the SHBP. She also announced that the **RETIREE OPTION CHANGE PERIOD (ROCP) will be held October 16 through November 3, 2023**. In an effort to support retirees with information, the SHBP will host eight "in-person" benefit meetings throughout Georgia during the ROCP. In addition, the SHBP will host a robust internet webinar.

One of the ways that you can assist the SHBP staff in assuring that you receive your plan information packet is to make sure that the SHBP has your current address. Then, when the "Decision Guide" is mailed (around 9/15-10/5/23), you will be assured of receiving the printed material. SHBP staff stated that they receive many phone calls about failing to receive information – but it was a result of the SHBP having an outdated address. FYI, your benefit option (UnitedHealthcare or Anthem) may have the correct address, but the SHBP membership/enrollment may have an outdated address or phone number. You can make sure that your address and phone number are correct by going to the [SHBP enrollment portal](#) or by calling SHBP Member Services: 1-800-610-1863.

SHBP staff stated that the DCH Board has not yet approved the premium rates or any changes in benefit options for January 1, 2024. The benefit changes are probably minor, but the Board will address any changes and the premium rates at an August meeting. GSRA will, of course, report on any updated rates and/or benefits in our next newsletter.

SHBP also warned retirees against **dropping SHBP coverage by mistake during the Option Change Period**. Each year, around November-December, there are many advertisements, usually with "celebrity" spokespersons, promoting new Medicare coverage or enrollment in a supplemental MEDICARE plan. If you enroll in another Medicare option, such as a supplemental pharmacy plan or a supplemental Medigap plan, the Federal Medicare will drop you from the SHBP Medicare Advantage plan. Then the SHBP transfers the member to an unsubsidized premium rate which can be shockingly high.

Prohibition from enrolling in a Medigap policy of any kind is a Medicare ruling—not a SHBP ruling. However, such enrollment of another Medicare option (outside of the SHBP) will create a substantial problem for YOU—including permanent disenrollment from the SHBP Medicare option.

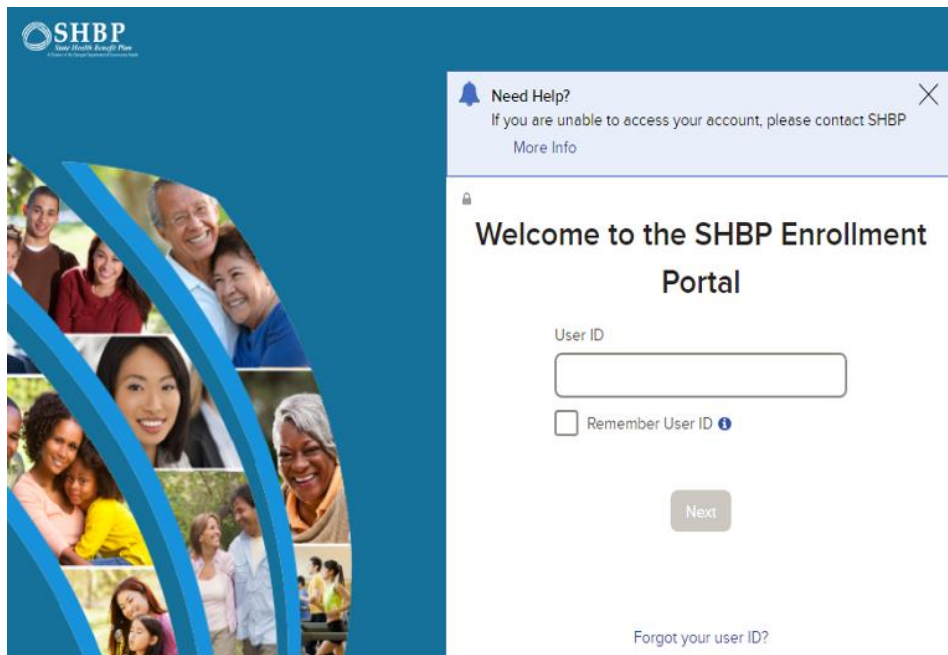
Our meeting concluded with a discussion of the role and function of the SHBP Advisory Council. Several Council members have related to GSRA that council members do not receive adequate and timely information in advance of

Board meetings to be able to convene and provide meaningful advice to the Department or the Board. GSRA suggested that SHBP seek feedback from Council members directly and propose process changes accordingly to assure ample time and opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations. SHBP staff agreed to share our concerns and recommendations with appropriate DCH/SHBP management.

GSRA will monitor for any proposed changes in the SHBP for January 1, 2024, and will, of course, publish the information as soon as feasible.

## Is Everything Up to Date?

Now is a good time to check your information on file with the State Health Benefits Plan to make sure your address, email, and telephone numbers are current and correct. Go to the Enrollment Portal at [SHBP enrollment portal](#) or call SHBP Member Services: 1-800-610-1863.



### Donate to GSRA Legal Fund

GSRA's Legal Fund was established as a dedicated legal fund in the event that leadership, on behalf of its members, ever has to retain legal counsel. The fund will be used to cover all appropriate legal fees related to ensuring that retiree benefits are not reduced or eliminated. Every donation makes a difference. For more information and to donate to this fund click on the link below.

[GSRA Legal Fund](#)

## Top of Mind: A Call to Board Service

By Beverly Littlefield



As we weather the days of the hottest summer on record, we've arrived at that time of year again. It's time to develop a slate of candidates for Board officers and leadership positions for 2024.

We need your involvement to ensure that our Board's leadership and operations continue without interruption and with the support it needs. Our current board is the best ever (I have thought that every year for as long as I've been involved!) But this year we know that there will be some turnover among both current elected and appointed members. People who have served faithfully for many years are stepping away for a richly deserved break or to take care of personal obligations.

Here's the Big Ask, same as every year: Whether you're a long-time member or have joined GSRA relatively recently, please consider getting involved at the Board or committee level. GSRA has two strategic priorities: Legislative Advocacy and Membership Development. From the Board level, to the chapters and the individual members, our goal is to assure that everything we do supports, aligns and integrates both. In order to do that, we need not only Board officers, but at-large members and consulting members who have expertise in a variety of areas.

Maybe you retired a while ago and weren't free at the time to make a volunteer commitment. Now you have time and you'd like to spend some of it doing something meaningful. Or if you've retired more recently, and in making the transition, are missing being a part of something that makes a difference, Board service may be just the thing you're looking for. In either case, be assured that living in or near Atlanta is *not* necessary to participate fully in Board life and activities. While we do meet in person several times during the year, usually in Covington, we always provide access to the meetings by Zoom. Long gone are the days of everyone driving from Georgia's four corners to attend a Board meeting every month.

Whether or not you can commit to being an officer, or to serve as an elected at-large member, you still can participate as a part of the Policy and Operations (P&O) committee. Established to provide support to the Board through appointment rather than election, P&O members provide their invaluable expertise and special skills in all facets of our operations: advocacy, planning, technology, communications/social media management, marketing, health care policy, financial management and member/chapter relations, among the many areas of our operations.

After 17 years, GSRA is still very much a volunteer-based organization. Our contract support staff and volunteer Board/Committee members are outstanding, but they can't do it all. We need to assure that we have a diverse and broad array of members throughout the entire statewide network. We need

people who are willing to take on a greater leadership role in order to help maintain continuity in our operations.

Over the life of our organization, our advocacy has gained momentum and earned respect. As a result, we have seen in the last few years tangible proof of the value of our work. We have received the first Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)/raise granted in 14 years. We have worked for the appropriations of funds for additional adjustments and continue to establish and foster relationships with legislators, policy makers and pension system administrators. And our membership numbers continue to grow. We have moved forward and will continue in that direction.

But we can accomplish so much more with your involvement.

We can't do it without you.

Please contact me at [brlittlefield1@yahoo.com](mailto:brlittlefield1@yahoo.com) , Sadie Rogers at [sl872@bellsouth.net](mailto:sl872@bellsouth.net) or [help@mygsra.com](mailto:help@mygsra.com) not later than August 31 if you are interested in getting involved.

## Local Chapter News

### ABC of Douglas Chapter

The Atkinson, Bacon, and Coffee (ABC) counties that make up the Douglas Chapter met on July 17, 2023 at 11:00 am at the Covered Wagon Country Buffet in Douglas, Georgia. Our guest speaker was Melissa Fletcher, the Silver Sneaker facilitator at The Wellness Center at Coffee Regional Medical Center. She provided helpful information on heat related health issues and information regarding health and wellness.

The next meeting of the ABC of Douglas Chapter will be on October 16, 2023 at 11:00 am at the Covered Wagon Country Buffet, located at 2639 US-441 in Douglas, Georgia. All state retirees, state employees, and their guests are invited for a Dutch treat lunch.



Members of the ABC of Douglas Chapter at the July meeting at the Covered Wagon restaurant

## CSRA of Augusta Chapter

The Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) chapter monthly meeting was held on July 18, 2023 at the Richmond County Health Department. Chapter President Clara Brown welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Newcomers who had not attended any meetings in the past introduced themselves to the group. After Barbara Lariscy read the summary from the last meeting, Clara shared that the annual chapter budget had been approved and discussed starting a petty cash fund emphasizing there must be an official record kept for petty cash just as with the official budget. At this time the petty cash will be funded by free will offerings at the end of chapter meetings.

Clara discussed items from the GSRA Board meeting such as the postcard project and solicited volunteers to address and mail to prospective members. There are some Board positions coming open and Barbara Lariscy stated she is willing to accept a position. Barbara also shared details on the upcoming Annual Meeting in Columbus in October. Each chapter is expected to provide or contribute to door prizes/swag bags.

Clara announced that the chapter still has vacant positions and presented them by name. No one accepted any of them. Clara assured everyone that there is no pressure the positions will be filled eventually.

Sandra Schumann shared our logo image, marketing membership, the importance of membership and pension deduction. She also provided pension deduction forms to those requesting them.

Clara closed the meeting by thanking attendees for supporting CSRA-GSRA, asking them to bring a friend to future meetings, to join their social media group and share the social media posts.

The chapter meets on the 3rd Tuesday each month. The next meeting date is August 15 at 1pm at the Richmond Health Department, 950 Laney Walker Blvd., Augusta, GA 30901.



Members of the Augusta/CSRA Chapter at the July meeting

## Thomasville Chapter

The Thomasville Chapter GSRA will meet on Wednesday, August 9 at 11am at the Thomas County Public Library located at 201 North Madison Street in Thomasville. The Thomas County Emergency Management team will present a program on disaster preparedness. All Chapter members and potential members are encouraged to attend, so please bring a guest.

The Thomasville Chapter serves the counties of Brooks, Decatur, Grady, Mitchell, Seminole and Thomas, advocating for retirees and active state employees and educators. For more information about the Thomasville Chapter, email: [thomasvillegsra@rose.net](mailto:thomasvillegsra@rose.net)

### Southwest Georgia-Albany Chapter

The Southwest Georgia-Albany chapter met on July 12th at Albany State University's West campus. Seventeen attendees were present including two first time guests. The program was presented by Heather O'Connor RN, a certified diabetes care and education specialist with Phoebe Hospital's Diabetes and Nutrition Center. She shared information on diabetes, the risk factors and symptoms/signs.

The Albany-Southwest Georgia Chapter serves 17 counties. The next meeting of the Southwest Georgia chapter meeting is planned for October 18th. For more information about this chapter, contact President Robert Pollock at [bobpollock111@yahoo.com](mailto:bobpollock111@yahoo.com).



Southwest Georgia Chapter members in attendance at the July meeting

## In Memoriam - Jane Cooper, Pioneer Member of South Fulton Chapter



Earlier this summer we learned of the passing of Miss Jane Chandler Cooper, a founder and longtime leader in the South Fulton Chapter of GSRA. An Atlanta native, over her life, Jane lived in the Tri-City, Lakewood, East Point and West End areas of the city. Educated in the Atlanta Public Schools, as an adult Jane became active in the affairs of her community and church. She was known as someone who could connect with and relate to people from all walks of life.





# Newsletter

Jane’s work life included over twenty years of service with the Georgia Department of Revenue/Motor Vehicle Division, from which she retired in 2001. In retirement she became active in GSRA, as a significant contributor to the emerging South Fulton Chapter. She made many friends who remained close for the rest of her life.

Friends gathered in April 2023 for a graveside service Westview Cemetery in celebration of Jane’s life.


## Welcome new members!

JUNE			
Name	County	Name	County
Donna Barkley	Clayton	Hester McColloch	Wayne
Kay Bohlen	Morgan	Gary McConville	Fulton
Cheryl Bonham	Berrien	Sharon Moore	Fulton
Gary Bryant	Out of State	Julie Payne	Polk
Brenda Burnette Rogers	Stephens	Kathryn Pfirman	DeKalb
Stan Crane	Gwinnett	Terrie Reynolds	Henry
George Cross	Fayette	John Rich	Thomas
Janette Daniel	Richmond	Elizabeth Roe	Clayton
Tracy Feltman	Murray	Kathreen Scott	Fayette
Gwen Knight	Paulding	Elisa Seidl	Hancock
Latrenda Kyles	Henry	Laurie Stanley	Gwinnett
Joseph Lindsey	Bibb	Michael Wakefield	Fulton
Larry Marshall	Richmond	Lisa Walker	Fulton
Susan McClendon	Cobb	Arthur Woodson	Bibb
		Deborah York	Whitfield

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\*Fixed simple interest rate: 34.71% per year with a one-time fee of \$49.00. For example, a \$3,000.01 loan repaid in 26 installments over 26 months, the APR will be 35.95% and the approximate monthly payment will be \$170.00 (assumes a loan execution date of 06/01/2023). Other terms and conditions apply, and your loan may vary depending upon your loan execution date, actual payroll deduction schedule, etc. Must be employed for at least 1 year with the employer to be eligible to apply. Not all applicants will qualify for a loan. Loan is based on an agreement between the borrower and BMG Money, Inc. The Georgia State Retiree Association is not responsible for any financial aspects of LoansforRetirees.



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\*2017 UnitedHealthcare Customer Experience Survey scores for Group Medicare Advantage plan members. Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare.  
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