

GSRA Day - We Need YOU to Get Involved!

Our GSRA Day at the Capitol and GSRA/GPHSA Legislative Reception events are coming up on February 5th on Capitol Hill in Atlanta. No registration is needed for the day event – just show up at 9:45 am at the Capitol stairs and help your fellow members distribute Swag Bags along with our Goals & Objectives. It's crucial that we demonstrate a strong GSRA presence this year.

If you can stay for the Legislative Reception please register by January 31st by going to www.mygsra.com . **Remember to invite your legislators!** We all want to get our COLAs restored & this is your best opportunity to make that happen.

We need you to represent in sufficient numbers to show legislators and state leadership that retired State employees are a robust, voting group that can affect election outcomes. We cannot make this happen without **YOU!**

Legislative Session – Retiree Adjustments Not Mentioned

In his annual State of the State address, the Governor did not mention adjustments for retirees, being consistent with his annual budget report, which has neither funding nor any language regarding ERS retiree adjustments. The Governor also made no mention of a second successive cut in the maximum income tax rate, which would cut revenues by an estimated \$550 million. Since many legislative leaders have expressed doubt about making this cut in a year of reduced revenues and related budget cuts, it appears this action is off the table for this session.

The Governor also promised to take action to limit the prevalence of surprise medical billing, an issue that GSRA has been working tirelessly to correct for several years now. The governor said, "Working with patients, providers and the private sector, we'll craft legislative remedies to reduce surprise medical billing." SB 293 by Sen. Chuck Hufstetler and with bipartisan sponsorship is the

best bill that GSRA has seen on this matter. It provides that patients would not be billed for more than their inpatient costs and resolves provider-insurer reimbursement disputes by establishing an arbitration procedure. The governor said, "Working with patients, providers and the private sector, we'll craft legislative remedies to reduce surprise medical billing."

Both the House and the Senate have carry-over bills from last session that have received the requested actuarial cost projections. We reported earlier that at this year's first meeting of the House Retirement Committee, Rep. Chuck Martin presented an amended HB 667 for a hearing only (no vote). This bill makes several changes to the Teachers Retirement System which would accelerate paying off that system's unfunded liability which presently stands at 22% -- that

is, the fund has 78% of the money necessary to pay off the cost projected benefits assuming no further payments or investment earnings into the system. The unfunded liability for ERS is about 25%. As reported by Rep. Martin, this summer's actuarial study estimates that his bill would cost about \$300 million annually to the retirement system which has had little problems granting annual 3% COLAs to its members. Rep. Martin repeatedly stated that his bill would be necessary at some point to keep promises made to TRS members. But this annual \$300 million would almost pay for the 3% annual COLA which was promised to ERS members, but which has not been paid for upwards of 12 years. You can view Rep. Martin's presentation and the response by GSRA Legislative Committee Chairman Chuck Freedman by clicking on

<https://livestream.com/.../25.../events/8737131/videos/200757263>, and then positioning your cursor on the faint line at the bottom of the screen. This will result in a time being displayed. Move the cursor until you see 1:19:40 (the time at which Rep. Martin is called to present his bill.

GSRA has two bills ready to be introduced. Consistent with our legislative goals, one bill will seek to authorize COLAs for GSEPS members, and another will look to make the consideration of ERS board member appointees consistent with the procedure followed by TRS. We will keep you informed when these happen. As always, your legislative crew will be working hard to advocate for your interests.

Questionnaire Sent to All State Legislators

At the end of 2019, GSRA sent a questionnaire to every state legislator asking for a response by January 20, 2020. The responses were to be shared with the GSRA

membership. An excerpt from the letter accompanying the questionnaire is below:

“December 30, 2019

Honorable State Rep./State Senator,

The Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA) is a non-profit, volunteer organization that advocates on behalf of active and retired state employees who are vested members of the Employee Retirement System of Georgia.

One of GSRA's goals for 2020 is to ensure that our members are fully informed on the positions of the members of the Georgia House of Representatives and Senate on issues of critical importance to retired and active state employees.

To that end, we ask that you complete and return the enclosed questionnaire by no later than January 20, 2020. The results (including a listing of those Representative and Senators that failed to complete the questionnaire) will be shared with our statewide membership.

I want to thank you for your service to the citizens of Georgia and your willingness to share your views with those active and retired employees who dedicated their careers to the service of the State of Georgia.”

Click to access the [letter](#), the [questionnaire](#), and the [response tally](#).

To date, eight legislators have responded: Rep. Bill Hitchens, Rep. Kim Schofield, Rep. Matthew Gambill, Rep. Josh McLaurin, Rep. Marc Morris, Rep. Donna McLeod, Rep. Rhonda Burnough, and Rep. Angelika Kausche. Rep. Gerald Greene indicated he could not respond at this time pending review of any proposed bills and an audit.

The questions: 1. Will you support a COLA for retirees of the Employees' Retirement System? 2. What actions will you take to assist retirees in restoring their Cost of Living Adjustment? 3. Will you support legislation to require the Governor and the Board of Trustees of the Employees' Retirement System to consider board nominees put forth by the Georgia State Retirees Association in the same manner as is presently done for vacant positions on the Teachers Retirement System? 4. Will you support legislation to authorize COLAs for all state retirement systems? And 5. Will you support protection of consumers by eliminating balance billing by health insurance providers?

All legislators responded that they would support a COLA, some enthusiastically. Most would support action but with caution due to current "challenges". It was a mixed bag on the question of support ERS Board Nominations from GSRA – some would support, others would like to have additional information. Almost all indicated support for legislation to authorize a COLA for ERS Retirees; without fiscally damaging the fund. And most understand and support eliminating "surprise billing".

Overall, there was only a 3% response from legislators to the GSRA Questionnaire. During GSRA Day at the Capitol, participants will have an opportunity to again ask their legislators these questions and, with those questions in hand, ask for answers!



Members showed up to 2019's GSRA Day events in robust numbers. We need the same response in 2020 to ensure that we have the opportunity to converse with as many legislators as possible about the areas affecting state retirees.

New ERS Board Member Appointed

The Employees' Retirement System Board of Trustees has filled the vacancy left by the departure of Harold Reheis by appointing Homer Bryson to the board.

Mr. Bryson presently serves as Director of Homeland Security and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) and has been a state employee for nearly four decades. Prior to his present position, Bryson served as Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and as Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources.

Bryson and his wife, Lisa, a retired state employee, have three children and reside in Nicholson, Georgia.

GSRA leadership recently had what they felt was a very productive meeting with Director Bryson where they discussed GSRA's purpose, history, and legislative and other objectives. Since Bryson and his wife are both long-time state employees, he was very knowledgeable and receptive to our viewpoints, although, as expected, he was non-committal about some of our objectives.



Jim’s View: We Need Your Involvement!

I am disappointed that Governor Kemp’s proposed budget report for amended FY20 and for FY21 do not contain additional funds (other than those needed to meet the ADEC) for the Employee Retirement System (ERS). However, it should be noted that budget reports for all but one of the past several years did not contain additional appropriations for ERS and we were able to work with the members of the General Assembly and the ERS Board to secure one time “bonus” payments.

So be assured that we will increase our efforts to lobby for the restoration of the across the board 1.5% semi-annual cost of living adjustment. While we will still continue to meet with members of the Governor’s staff, we are focusing our efforts on the legislature and ERS Board as we work to attain the legislative goals and objectives we have for 2020.

Here’s how you can assist in our efforts:

- GSRA Day at the Capitol is February 5th. We need as many members as possible to attend at least part of if not all of the activities planned for that day. It is not too late to register and attend. If you wake up on February 5th and decide to come to Atlanta, please do;

- Personally invite your senator and representative to our legislative reception. The reception is an excellent opportunity to have some one on one time with your legislator;

- Respond to each and every action alert from GSRA that you receive. Be sure to respond in your own words. These action alerts are effective if they are received in large numbers and are in your own words;

- Attend the ERS Board meetings. You will normally receive an action alert requesting your attendance at ERS Board meeting. A large turnout of GSRA members at the board meetings does have an impact on the ERS Board members.

These next couple of months are very critical for GSRA if we are going to be successful in attaining our 2020 legislative goals. We need your help and support. As a certain football coach and the Governor are fond of saying, “Keep Chopping Wood”. Your GSRA leaders are doing exactly that and we need you to do the same. See you on February 5th!

Jim



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](#)




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APCU serves State and Federal workers, retirees and their families in Georgia. Visit APCU's website today at gsra.com, or call us at (404) 768-4125 or TOLL-FREE at (800) 847-8413.



APCU partners with Member Wealth Management, a financial services program, to help our members with financial planning, investments, insurance, as well as retirement and estate planning strategies.

APCU has invited Sherril Roman, a Managing Associate with Member Wealth Management, to offer a great workshop, "Money Talk 101", at GSRA. This session is designed to facilitate conversations around financial education for retirees.

Topics will include:

- ★ The importance of setting financial goals
- ★ Understanding your current financial position
- ★ Preparing for a successful retirement
- ★ Income tax considerations
- ★ What your loved ones need to know

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