

This GSRA Newsletter *ERS Special Edition* is a sampling of articles from newsletters published to date in 2020. This is representative of the newsletter GSRA members receive each month as part of GSRA's objective of keeping ERS retirees well-informed about anything important regarding their state retiree benefits, along with other topics of interest to members.

For even more information about GSRA, [click here to view a video introducing our organization](#), and see the last page of this newsletter for a mail-in application.



GSRA Members pose with Governor Kemp at the Capitol before embarking on *GSRA Day* Activities

Members Make 2020 *GSRA Day* Successful!

GSRA Members gathered under the Gold Dome in Atlanta on February 5, 2020. *GSRA Day* began with a photo with Governor Kemp and continued with updates shared by GSRA President, Jim Sommerville, GSRA Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay, GSRA Legislative Committee Chair Chuck Freedman, and GSRA Legislative Committee member Joseph Drolet. GSRA members visited all Legislative Offices/Members to deliver a GSRA Swag Bag containing the 2020 Goals and Objectives and other GSRA items.

GSRA Members from all corners of the State of Georgia were unified in expressing their concerns to the Legislative members. The failure to receive a Cost of Living Adjustment was foremost in the concerns; however, the increasing cost of Health Insurance, members being billed for out-of-network providers in emergency care, and all issues regarding changes to the retirement and health insurance plans were also of utmost importance.

In the afternoon, GSRA Members attended House and Senate Committees meetings. GSRA in conjunction with

the Georgia Public Human Services Association hosted a “Thank You” reception in honor of all Legislative members. The reception was attended by more than 30 Legislators, including the Chairs of both the House and Senate Retirement Committees.

In a short program, GSRA President Sommerville thanked all of Georgia’s elected officials for their dedication and support. He then presented Representative Tommy Benton, Chair of the House Retirement Committee with the *GSRA Legislative Service Award*. Chairman Benton was gracious in his acceptance of the Award.



President Sommerville presents Chairman Benton with the *GSRA Legislative Service Award*

GSRA also presented its long-time Administrative Assistant, Donna Buffum, who is retiring from the position with GSRA, with a proclamation showing its appreciation for her dedication and exemplary service.

GSRA Officers and Board thank all of the members who participated in this very important day and reception. President Sommerville proclaimed that the activities were successful in making the General Assembly members aware of the members’ concerns.



GSRA’s long-time Administrative Assistant, Donna Buffum, accepts appreciation proclamation from Board Member and past President BJ Bennett and Legislative Committee Chair Chuck Freedman

Taken from the February 2020 GSRA Newsletter

GSRA’s First Ever Major Bill Passes on Crossover Day Before General Assembly Session Crashes to Covid 19 Halt

As of March 12, the General Assembly had completed 28 days, including crossover day. Its session was suspended immediately and indefinitely following day 28 due to the coronavirus, Covid 19. Before that halt, however, GSRA was successful in having its first ever major bill passed, HB

821. The General Assembly met in special session on March 16 to pass a bill authorizing the governor to take emergency actions to mitigate the Covid 19 crisis.

Among the bills crossing over was the amended FY ’20 budget. It contained a large number of changes from the

Governor's recommendations, mostly restorations of his cuts. Unfortunately, the House then passed HB 949 which would cut the income tax rate by .375% and potentially result in an annual revenue reduction of \$500 million (estimates vary). The House passed out its version of the "big" budget for FY '21. HB 793 includes the following statement: "The Board of Trustees is urged to consider a benefit adjustment for retired state employees in accordance with sound actuary principles." We thank House Appropriations Chair Terry England and the rest of the House for including this language.

Also crossing over was HB 821, which was introduced at the urging of GSRA. HB 821 would remove the prohibition against COLAs for GSEPS retirees as well as for judicial and legislative systems' retirees. It was co-sponsored by Representatives Sainz and Buckner and sailed through committee. However, it ran into a bump on the House floor that required assistance from your GSRA legislative team to pass, which it did. Read about the events at mygsra.com.

SB 26 by Sen. Ligon to allow members of the state's defined contribution plan to buy equivalent credit in the state's defined benefit plan still remains alive in the House. Also crossing over were these retirement bills:

- HB 830 which would increase the permissible level of alternative investments to 10% of all large retirement systems' funds. GSRA has expressed its concerns about this bill.
- SB 294 which authorizes TRS to invest in alternative investments.

And these bills addressing medical surprise billing and various aspects of pharmaceutical pricing and consumers' access to drugs:

- SB 303, SB 359, HB 789, HB 888 and HB 991 taking various measures to prevent surprise billings. GSRA has long supported the intent of these bills and several look promising.
- SB 313, HB 918, HB 946, HB 947 regulating certain aspects of pharmacy benefits managers' activities with the purpose of reducing drug pricing and improving consumers' access to drugs. GSRA has not taken a position on these bills until we can ascertain their impact on the SHBP and state retirees' prescription drug costs.

Taken from the March 2020 GSRA Newsletter

ERS Delivers Expected Bad News to Members

ERS BOARD MEETING 4/16/2020

At its meeting on April 16, the various ERS boards unanimously decided not to award a benefit adjustment of any kind to any of the retirement systems they administer. This naturally included us in the ERS. The board also declined once again to instruct its actuarial firm to include funding for COLAs in its annual projected actuarially determined employer's contribution (ADEC).

This was not what we hoped for but not unexpected. The reasons given by the board were financial market volatility impact on the ERS fund and future volatility. The board might also have added the likely plunge in state revenue collections, another sound reason for caution. However, many of us in GSRA had asserted to the board that while the current market and revenue declines were undeniable, history teaches us that both the market and revenues will

recover. Many also noted that at present, active ERS and TRS employees are slated to receive COLAs as are TRS retirees, and that it was therefore only fair to provide COLAs to the single state population that had not received any for over eleven years.

In his Secretary's report, Mr. Potvin provided much other information of interest to retirees. This included:

- So far, there has been no problem making benefits' direct deposits, and he doesn't anticipate any future problems. There also have been no problems so far distributing paper checks (900), but he is concerned with the contracted printer being able to continue performance. ERS is attempting to convince individuals who receive paper checks to convert to direct deposits.

- Since ERS signed a memorandum of understanding with GSRA to share retirees' contact information, roughly 55-60% of retirees have elected to share contact info. ERS is happy to continue sharing information.
- The requirement for employees to be working from home during this pandemic has one potential benefit in that ERS is rethinking how it might recover from a future disaster. Until now the thought has been to have a building in a different location available which could be converted into an office. But now, future disaster recovery plans are being reoriented to teleworking rather than having to reopen an office.

- After conducting a procurement for a Peach State Reserves administrator, ERS decided to stay with the current provider

Ed Koebel of Cavanaugh Macdonough delivered the actuary's report. Mr. Koebel's presentation slides begin on page 13 [here](#). As of last June 30, ERS's funding ratios were healthy and increasing, up to 75.6%. And the ADEC does not include the cost of a COLA. GSRA continues to find this curious, particularly in light of Mr. Koebel's revelations that both LRS and PSERS projections do include the cost of COLAs.

Taken from the April 2020 GSRA Newsletter



Jim's View: Membership Plans in the Works

I hope you are having a great summer in spite of the pandemic.

Although we have been unable to meet in person, the GSRA Board has been able to meet using Zoom. So while these are the hot lazy days of summer, your GSRA Board has not been lazy. We are taking this opportunity to sit back and do some short term and long term planning.

You have by now received an email from me concerning the potential development of a long range strategic plan for GSRA. So I will not bore you with that subject.

Increasing GSRA's membership is always an ongoing planning effort. Since the pandemic has stopped most person to person meetings, we are going to try something new- a virtual recruitment campaign (thanks to Melissa Belk-Teague for the idea). Several members of the Board are preparing short videos that with the help of Melissa's husband will be turned into a [video clip](#) that will be included in a special newsletter that the ERS will be sending out via email to retirees that are not currently GSRA members. We hope that the video clip will also be available on our webpage and Facebook page soon thereafter. We are also looking at other avenues to get GSRA's name in front of as many retirees and soon to be retirees as possible. There is strength in numbers and GSRA needs to increase its' membership in order to be successful in meeting future

challenges. I urge you to continue your efforts to attract new members.

While we did have some successes legislatively this year, we did not meet all of our legislative goals. We have begun the process of developing our strategy to turn those unmet goals into met goals. We hope to be meeting with key decision makers over the next several months to lay the groundwork for the upcoming legislative session. You can help here as well. It is an election year, so your representative and senator may be more visible around town. So if you see your elected representative, introduce yourself as a retired state employee and GSRA member and tell them how the lack of a cost of living adjustment for 10 years has adversely impacted your quality of life. They need to hear from GSRA members as often as possible.

Thank you for your continuing support of GSRA. I hope to be able to talk with you in person soon.

Be safe, stay healthy and follow all CDC pandemic advisories.

Jim

Taken from the July 2020 GSRA Newsletter

Membership Application

If you are unable to join using our website at www.MyGSRA.com, then complete your "pension deduction form" or write a \$20 check (or money order) made payable to:

Georgia State Retirees Association, Inc.

Mail this form with either your pension deduction form, or your check or money order, to:

GSRA Dues - PO Box 108 - Bethlehem, GA 30620

Please print clearly!

First Name: _____ MI _____

Last Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State _____ Zip: _____

County of Residence _____

Phone: (_____) _____

Mobile: (_____) _____

Which Local Chapter? _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Check one: Male Female

Agency Affiliation _____

Retirement Date _____

Circle Retirement System - ERS PSERS TRS Other

Circle below how you learned about GSRA.

WRAP session Newspaper GSRA Member

Conference Advertisement Local Chapter

New Application _____ Renewal _____