



Newsletter

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www.MyGSRA.com

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GSRA Continues Efforts to Obtain Meaningful COLAs

GSRA has had a lot of irons in the fire in February. Of greatest note are our efforts to obtain meaningful COLAs for FY 2023 and all future years. In that regard, we analyzed the impact on COLAs of the current amount of COLA funding combined with the proposed ERS COLA formula. We found, unfortunately, that the combination of the governor's recommended amount of "prefunding" for our COLA and the proposed ERS formula will likely NOT yield annual COLAs which will be meaningful nor satisfy the legislative intent codified in O.C.G.A. 47-2-29 of "providing for postretirement benefit adjustments for the purpose of maintaining essentially no less purchasing power for a beneficiary in his postretirement years." Based on our analysis, we predict that COLAs of less than 1% will be granted in most years in the near future, including no COLAs at all in many of those years. This is in concert with ERS informing us that the FY 2023 COLA will be either 1.25% or 1.5% after a year in which inflation has exceeded 7%.

It became more than obvious to GSRA leadership that even the large amount of \$150 million recommended by the governor for COLA funding will fall way short of being enough. So we stepped up our campaign to have the governor increase his revenue estimate and to obtain more funds from the General Assembly. We did this by first sharing our analysis and funding request with legislators and with the governor's executive staff. See [GSRA COLA Analysis](#). We contacted members of the Senate Retirement Committee who advocated for 3% COLAs both in committee and on the floor. And GSRA President Beverly Littlefield presented our case to the ERS board at its February meeting. See [Pres. Littlefield Addresses ERS Board](#).

We then issued an action alert requesting members to write, call, or visit their legislators and the governor and

again request more funding for COLAs. We hope that you participated.

Within the last few days we learned that the Senate Retirement Security for Georgians Study Committee report had been published and that its recommendations include that the General Assembly consider annual inflation adjustments not to exceed 3%.

In a related area, SB 343, which contains provisions to make GSEPS retirees eligible for COLAs and to increase the employer match of GSEPS's active employees' savings, passed out of committee and then the entire Senate. GSEPS COLA eligibility has long been advocated by GSRA. See senators' support for both SB 343 and 3% COLAs here: [SB 343 on Senate Floor](#).

Two other bills which impact ERS retirees are HB 1003 and HB 1288. HB 1003 would govern contracts between health insurers and providers. HB 1288 would allow beneficiaries of state group term life insurance members to assign life insurance benefits to licensed funeral services providers to pay for funeral services. GSRA is in the process of assessing both bills and is actively monitoring their progress.

The session is just about half over. Much remains to be done, and your GSRA team will continue its efforts until the last gavel drops. We expect that we will be calling on you again to continue convincing your legislators and the governor that we and our issues are not going away, and we are ready to line up at our elections precincts when those times come.

SB 343 is a Good Bill Worthy of GSRA Support

Some of our members have suggested that passage of SB 343, which enables GSEPS retirees to receive future COLAs and which increases the employer match for 401(k) savings, will make it less likely that Old and New Plan retirees receive meaningful COLAs. GSRA's take is that, to the contrary, it is highly doubtful that Old and New Plan members will be *more* likely to obtain COLAs if the GSEPS provisions in SB 343 do not become law.

Besides COLA eligibility being the equitable thing to do for current state employees covered by the Georgia State Employee Pension and Savings Plan (GSEPS), that and the increased employer contribution to the pension fund and increased employer match for GSEPS employees' 401(k) contributions address critical employee turnover, recruitment and retention issues. These were going to be addressed REGARDLESS of whether funding was to be made

available for Old and New Plan COLAs. See the testimonies documented in the report of the Senate Retirement Security for Georgians Study Committee [here](#). Also see Sen. Hufstetler presenting SB 343 to both the Senate Retirement Committee [here](#) and to the Senate as a whole [here](#).

There is absolutely nothing to be gained in regards to increased COLAs by opposing SB 343 and much to lose. GSRA is thankful for the efforts of Sen. Hufstetler and the sponsors of SB 343.

Negotiations between SHBP and WellStar Reach an Impasse

Contract negotiators failed to reach agreement about UnitedHealthcare's (UHC) reimbursement rates and compensation for WellStar providers, with the contract expiring effective December 31, 2021. As a result, some State Health Benefit Plan members may be impacted if they have been receiving care through WellStar, as the healthcare system may now be "out-of-network" for some insureds. However, retirees who have SHBP coverage under the UHC Medicare Advantage Plan may continue to receive services from WellStar without interruption in the payment process.

What WellStar is saying:

Generally, the UHC contract expiration does affect State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) commercial plans for current state employees and non-Medicare eligible retirees (under age 65), for whom WellStar is now considered to be out-of-network. That means that those affected will pay "out-of-network" deductibles and copays.

Although the contract with WellStar has expired, SHBP retirees who are enrolled in the UHC Medicare Advantage Plan (MAP) will continue to receive the same in-network

and out-of-network benefits. MAP members may continue to see their WellStar physicians and receive care at WellStar facilities without any change in their out-of-pocket costs.

Non-SHBP retirees who have traditional Medicare coverage plus AARP Medicare Supplemental Plans from UnitedHealthcare are not affected.

Veterans receiving care through the Veteran's Affairs Community Care Network with UnitedHealthcare are not affected by the contract expiration.

What UnitedHealthcare is saying:

"Our direct contracts with nearly 1,000 of the non-employed primary care physicians and specialists affiliated with WellStar Clinical Partners (WCP), the health system's clinically integrated network, are not affected by this negotiation. These physicians will remain in our network."

What you can do:

If you are affected by the contract expiration, you may choose to continue receiving care through WellStar and pay any additional out-of-pocket costs for continuing care.

You may ask for referrals to providers who may accept current insurance.

You should not be turned away under any circumstances.

For questions for WellStar: 770-956-STAR (7827).



Top of Mind: We Deserve Better

The host of a popular radio program on personal finance, when asked how he's doing, always replies, "Better than I deserve." He says that if you follow his plan for personal financial management, including getting out of and staying out of debt, you always will have all you will ever need, maybe even more, and will be able to live a prosperous, pleasurable life. And he makes it sound pretty easy.

Many of us might even embrace that philosophy ourselves. We worked hard, paid our share into our pension plans, maybe even saved some extra. We thought our well-being in retirement was assured, because we "followed the plan." Many of us live in our own homes, drive decent cars, have our health, and take vacations. But is that "better than we deserve?"

Among us are fellow retirees who are not doing so well, despite their hard work during their years of service and their best efforts to live within their means in retirement. They "followed the plan," too. But, their means continue to dissipate because of a retirement income that has not kept pace with the cost of living.

It appears evident that, in today's society and economy, lower and middle-income people cannot save their way to prosperity. So, in retirement, when the safety net of a defined benefit pension and regular cost of living adjustments has gaping holes in it, people are slipping down the economic ladder, instead of, at the very least, staying on the same rung and living a relatively secure life.

GSRA's objective of restoring the annual COLA has gained some momentum and come somewhat closer to being a reality, due to the Governor's inclusion of some \$150 million in funding for the COLA in his budget. And, while we are deeply

appreciative of his support, we believe that the COLA that many retirees would realize would be insubstantial at best. And, that we deserve better.

In our advocacy campaign, we have used the median pension payout of \$22,000 a year as a reference point to show why a COLA less than 2% will provide little meaningful relief to retirees at or below that benefit level. Back-of-the-envelope math shows that a 1.25% COLA (the last figure we've heard) will generate an increase of \$275 per year. You don't even need a calculator to see that this amounts to about \$23 a month.

If I'm one of those retirees, I could be philosophical and reason that this is more than I had before. This is true. But if I were struggling with increases in co-pays for prescriptions and medical care, and with rising food and utility costs, I would be exasperated that anyone would think this is sufficient to make a difference in my situation. And this is exactly what some of you have told us. One person said that the current proposal amounts to a "slap in the face." Another called it "an insult."

We've been told by policy makers and legislators that this is just a "first step," that there will be more to come over the next few years. But many retirees are clinging by a thread. They may not have another few years.

We've earned our compensation, including our pensions. We planned our retirements, believing, as we had been assured, we would receive annual COLAs in an amount adequate to preserve our purchasing power. It seems, though, in order to keep demands on the state budget to a minimum, little has been done proactively to shore up the retirement system's finances, besides employing astute investment management practices for

wringing out the maximum returns on investment and reduce debt. But, just as one no longer can save their way to prosperity, it also seems clear that the state can't invest its way out of a funding shortfall in the retirement system, either.

That's why our advocacy continues to focus on obtaining additional funding to bring the retirement system's assets up to the level at which a decent COLA

is feasible, while maintaining the integrity of the system.

We deserve better.

Beverly

Time to begin thinking about the

2022 GSRA Annual Meeting

October 3-4, 2022

Lake Blackshear Resort

The *2022 GSRA Annual Meeting* will be LIVE AND IN PERSON. So mark your calendars now and be ready to make your room reservations for Sunday and Monday, October 2nd and 3rd and join with friends, old and new state employees, and retirees to celebrate the passing of the Covid pandemic to the Covid endemic and hear the results for retirees' pensions as a result of the 2022 Legislative Session, as well as next year's health insurance benefits and costs.

If you wish to come down early or stay later we'll have rooms available the nights of Sunday, October 2, Monday, October 3, and Tuesday, October 4, for those who wish to stay an extra day and drive home refreshed, or boat, golf, or just relax.

Detailed information about the *2022 GSRA Annual Meeting*, including session information and lodging specifics, will be coming out soon. Stay tuned!

GSRA Member Spotlight

GSRA occasionally likes to feature our members, who come from a background of all areas of State of Georgia government from all over the state. This presents our organization with the unique opportunity that having a geographically diverse membership who performed a variety of state functions provides. This month Marlene Autry is featured.



Marlene Autry
GSRA member

Marlene Autry of Bartow County retired from state employment in January 2019 and has been a member of GSRA since before her retirement.

She began her career in 1991 as an Economic Support Services (ESS) caseworker at Cherokee County DFCS and continued her service to the state in the NW Georgia area as Error Control Specialist and later as Economic Support Supervisor. This was prior to her move to the state office in

2000 where she served as an ESS Regional Consultant. She finished her career with the Office of Inspector General, serving as North Georgia's Regional Director.

She was honored to receive the DHS Supervisor of the Year award in 2018.

Ms. Autry is most proud of her three children, eight grandchildren and three (soon to be four) great grandchildren.

January New Members

Name	County		Name	County		Name	County
Sunil Aluri	Fulton		Dennis Dunn	Gwinnett		Jimmy Hyde	Henry
Shirley Beasley	Fayette		Glenn Durrence	Tattnall		Sarah Kerns	Cobb
Clayton Bennett	Bartow		Thomas Durrence	Gwinnett		Julia Lee-Junior	Out of state
Catherine Branton	Bartow		Donna Easom	Seminole		Marieta Luke	Cherokee
Mark Brooks	Sumter		Ernestine Edwards	Cobb		Ann McKinley	Baldwin
Sam Bunn, Jr.	Spalding		John Ellis	Fulton		Jason Riner	McIntosh
Willie Byrd, Jr.	Dougherty		Melissa Florkowski	Fulton		Roy Rucks	Forsyth
Freda Carroll	Laurens		Dan Forster	Newton		Sreenath Shama	Fulton
Kathy Cater	Seminole		Cheryl Foskey	Atkinson		Artis Singleton	Brooks
Vicki Chambers	Habersham		Nancy Garry	Carroll		Jon Smith	Tattnall
Carol Comer	Cobb		Stanley Gaskins	Berrien		Susan Talgo	DeKalb
Jeannette David	Fulton		Anita Gidden	Dade		Sheikh Tejan	Clayton
Clifford Davis	Wayne		Keith Golden	Laurens		Frank Thach	Fulton
Lynda Delancey	Gwinnett		Ronald Green	Wayne		Paul Walker, Jr.	Laurens
Annie Duckworth	Cherokee		Claudette Hasan	DeKalb		Ronald Wishon	Cobb
Vinson Duke	Cook		Sylvia Hatfield	Crawford		Tony Young	Towns



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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We're not salespeople, we're solutions people. That's why nobody can serve our members like we can.

APCU serves State and Federal workers, retirees and their families in Georgia. Visit APCU's exhibitor table at GSRA. For more information, visit apcu.com, or call us at (404) 768-4726 or Toll-free at (800) 847-8433.

APCU
 AMERICAN PUBLIC CREDIT UNION
 A MEMBER OF CREDIT UNION

SERVING U.S. POSTAL SERVICE EMPLOYEES ★ STATE & FEDERAL EMPLOYEES IN GA ★ RETIREES & THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

This credit union is federally insured by the National Credit Union Administration.

APCU partners with Members 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 Shavon Roman, a Managing Associate with Members Wealth Management, to offer a great workshop, "Money Talk 101," at GSRA. This seminar is designed to facilitate conversations around financial milestones 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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