

## Finally! COLAs Appear Likely Next Year

Calendar year 2022 started off with a bang for GSRA. The bang is of, course, the fact that Governor Kemp included money in his proposed budget to begin the process of pre-funding COLAs for retired state employees. Soon after the Governor submitted his budget to the Georgia General Assembly, we received word that Senator Chuck Hufstetler was about to file a bill to amend the Official Code of Georgia to remove the prohibition against COLAs for GESEPS retirees. In one month, GSRA achieved two of its most critical legislative goals.

All of the above would not have been possible without the lobbying efforts of GSRA and our friends in the legislature, including, but not limited to, Senator Chuck Hufstetler, Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan, Senator Blake Tillery, Senator Nan Orrock, Senator Randy Robertson, Speaker of the House David Ralston, Representative Terry England, Representative John Carson, and Representative Debbie Buckner, among others.

At the same time, the Governor's Office directed ERS to develop a mechanism for determining the amount (in percentage) of COLA to be granted in any one calendar year. To that end, Jim Potvin and his staff at ERS have developed a formula that is intended to be used to set the percentage for COLAs to be awarded.

While we cannot divulge the particulars of the proposed formula at this time, GSRA leaders have been briefed on the formula by Jim Potvin. We are continuing to meet with Jim

Potvin and his staff to better understand the rationale behind the development of the formula. We very much appreciate the willingness of ERS to meet with GSRA to discuss questions and/or concerns we may have with the proposed formula. These meetings are ongoing.

While we are continuing our efforts to have the formula provide the very best outcome for state retirees, we are meeting with key legislative leaders to ensure that Senator Hufstetler's bill gets through the Senate and the House and signed by the Governor and that the money for pre-funding COLAS remains in the budget. This is crucial to accomplishing our goal of having the COLAs restored.

One thing we have heard from the legislators we have met with and from Jim Potvin is that this is just the first step in the process of funding to restore COLAs for state retirees. We have also been assured that the increase in the ADEC (Actuarially Determined Employer Contribution Rate) to pre-fund the COLAs will continue to be included in the ADEC next year and each year thereafter.

Please be assured that your GSRA leaders will continue to maximize our efforts to ensure that the outcome of all this positive momentum will result in the very best outcome for retired state employees.

Stay tuned for updates on the COLA saga and for any Action Alerts that are sent out, and thanks to our members for your continuing support.



---

## Top of Mind: The Circular Firing Squad

As a 501(c)4 organization, GSRA may advocate and lobby for the best interests of our dues-paying members, as well as all the other state retirees and current workers who may not even know that we exist. Because it's our mission and that's what we do. Starting with the GSRA Founders, developing relationships with members of the

General Assembly and Governors from both Parties has taken years. Some of the actors change with each election cycle and sometimes people who have been staunch allies leave office for one reason or another. With some cycles we have seen upheavals in party dominance that have changed the political face of the State. Representatives and Senators (not to mention Governors) who once were

Democrats are now Republicans. That means that GSRA starts the process of education, advocacy and relationship-building all over again. Every time.

That set of circumstances, coupled with the fact that we are an all-volunteer organization, results in very shallow bench depth for actually getting work done. And, we experience changes in our leadership, too. So continues the cycle of establishing and nurturing new relationships, both internally and externally, and of ongoing legislative advocacy and lobbying that a small group of GSRA leaders has continued to embrace tirelessly each year. And, not just during the legislative session.

The baseball Hall of Famer, Nolan Ryan, was said to say, “There’s no more off season.” That has never been truer for GSRA than in the last several years, during which pursuit of our legislative initiatives has not slowed nor faltered, even after the gavels came down and the shouts of “Sine Die” rang through the halls of the State House.

Each year, after the close of the session, our legislative team has continued to work ceaselessly to further our mission, which is to lobby for *your* best interests, all through the following months, until it’s time once again for the Wild Hog Supper. No more off season, indeed.

Notice, we don’t talk about working with one political party or the other, or working “across the aisle,” because we work with members on both sides of the aisle, regardless of who’s “in” or “out.” That is how we have built credibility on your behalf. That is what has gotten us to this historic juncture in our organization’s history of pursuing the restoration of the COLA for *all* ERS members. That we have received the support of the Governor, and key members

of both the House and the Senate, to further our cause, *your* cause, is unprecedented.

We have always represented *all* retirees and active workers who are members of the ERS. We also always have sought to work within the system to achieve our objectives, because to do otherwise would be folly. We have told our story, *your* story, over and over to all who would listen. Clearly some people have been listening.

Because of the legislation introduced this Session (SB343) and due to the hard work of GSRA and our friends, we have achieved a historic break-through this year. While far from perfect (a work in progress), SB 343 is a positive step forward, providing for, among other things, restoration of the ERS COLA and removal of the prohibition on COLAs for GSEPS, JRS and LRS retirees.

We are immensely pleased that we have this opportunity to continue our dialogue with leadership of both the General Assembly and the ERS. We are studying the proposed ERS policy changes that would pave the way for the approval of a COLA by the Board of Trustees in April. Currently we have asked for clarification of implementation methodologies and expected outcomes, so we can be as informed as possible and prepared for continued dialogue. And, we will stay the course to accomplish the greatest good for the greatest number of our constituents.

We have never taken an “all or nothing” stance in our activities and to do so now would amount to circling the wagons and pointing the guns inward. Circular firing squads only hurt those doing the shooting.

Beverly

#### GSRA Advocacy by the Numbers – Latest Action Alert

5,685	The total number of members who opened our Action Alert, “Breaking News on COLAs.”
2,350	The number who opened the Alert within the first 2.5 hours
100	The number of clicks on the Governor’s website within 2.5 hours
5,317	The number of members we reached by Facebook during January 2021
2,209	Total number of Likes, Shares, and/or Comments on Facebook for that period.
Thank you to everyone who took action! Your voices matter and have been heard! Thank you for your support, as always.	

## GSRA Member Spotlight

GSRA occasionally likes to feature our members who come from a background of all areas of State of Georgia government all over the state. This presents our organization with a unique opportunity that having a geographically diverse membership who performed a variety of state functions provides. This month, Susan Boatwright, Georgia Professional Human Services Association (GPHSA) Executive Director and GSRA member, is featured. Many of you know GPHSA as GSRA's closest association partner and co-sponsor with GSRA for many years of the GSRA/GPHSA Legislative Reception.



**Susan Boatwright**  
**GSRA member and GPHSA Executive Director**

Susan Boatwright joined GPHSA as the Executive Director in April 2021, following the retirement of Wayne Drummond after 17-plus years. Susan retired from her role as the Communication Director for the Division of Family and Children Services in 2017.

During her career with the Division, Susan served in a variety of positions for both the Office of Family Independence (OFI), which provides support to recipients of all financial assistance programs) and Child Welfare, including serving as the Region 5 OFI Regional Manager and later as the Gwinnett County Director. She also taught leadership training for two years with what is now the Knowledge Management section (formerly Education and Training).

Of the special partnership between GPHSA and GSRA Susan has this to say, "I believe the partnership between the two organizations strengthens our position legislatively and

coordinates the advocacy we can give to current and retired employees."

### 13<sup>th</sup> Check Reminder

As a reminder, the second of two one-time, non-accruing payments for ERS retirees, in lieu of a COLA, in FY22 will be showing up by the first week in February, the first payment having been made in July, 2021.

## Important: Get Your Flu Vaccination!



What's Happening: COVID-19, both the Delta and Omicron variants, is still very much with us. But, as if the pandemic isn't enough to keep up with, according to the Georgia Department of Public Health, the state's flu season is underway, having begun in October. The season usually peaks in late January or early February.

However, given the early and intense start of this season, it could last longer this year, persisting through March of this year. This flu season may be more severe than in years

past because H3N2 influenza is the dominant strain. Infections from this strain tend to result in more hospitalizations.

**Why It Matters:** Our healthcare systems continue to be inundated with COVID patients requiring emergency services and intensive care. For that reason, it is important for us to avoid needing hospitalization because of complications of influenza.

**What You Can Do:** It is more important than ever to protect against influenza, which, like COVID-19, is a respiratory illness. Getting the flu vaccine is critical to help reduce the overall impact of respiratory illnesses in the community and lower the resulting burden on the healthcare system during the pandemic.

It's not too late and Georgia still has plenty of flu vaccine. Contact your health care provider, a pharmacy, or your local county health department to make arrangements to receive the vaccine.

---

## December New Members

Name	County		Name	County		Name	County
Johnny Barber	Telfair		Thomas Dorman	Chatham		Joyce Pledger	Cherokee
Eric Bentley	White		Bruce Foisy	Glynn		Ronald Widner	Stephens
Bobbie Boling	Gordon		John Garnham	Cherokee			
Gregory Colson	Hart		Sue Pearson	Carroll			



### 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](#)





**We honor the CARE in healthcare.**

Call our First Impressions team at 1-855-322-7060, TTY: 711, to learn how we can help care for you.

**Anthem** 

© 2021 Anthem Health Plans of Georgia, Inc. All rights reserved. Anthem Health Plans of Georgia, Inc. is a registered trademark of Anthem Health Plans of Georgia, Inc. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.



**LIVE LIFE, UNINTERRUPTED.**

**KEEP LIVING YOUR WAY.**

You can, with these benefits and discounts from **GSRA & AMBA**:

- Dental & Vision Insurance
- Long-Term Care
- MASA (Air and Ground Ambulance Plan)
- Cancer, Heart & Stroke Policy
- Accident Policy
- Medicare Supplement Policy
- Easy Issue Life Policy
- Hearing Benefits
- Discounts on Travel, Dining & more

Learn more: 1-877-556-4582  
[myambabenefits.info/gsra](http://myambabenefits.info/gsra)

**GSRA**  **AMBA**   
 ASSOCIATION AMERICA RETIRES ASSOCIATION

**GEORGIA STATE RETIREES ASSOCIATION**

**YOU ARE OUR PRIORITY**

**OUR MEMBERS FORM THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.**

Since 1926, we've guided ourselves in helping members build a solid financial foundation for their own families.

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](http://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 Sharon 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



**UnitedHealthcare® is proud to be a sponsor of the GSRA Annual Meeting.**

**SHBP retirees give UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage plans over 96% satisfaction.\***

**Visit us online anytime**  
 Learn more at [www.UHCRetiree.com/shbp](http://www.UHCRetiree.com/shbp)  
 Toll-free 877-755-5343, TTY 711, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. local time, 7 days a week.



\*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.  
 H2001\_180921\_041543\_M

SPRJ44291