

*GSRA Day at the Capitol  
GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception  
February 3, 2016*



[Information and Registration](#)

## GSRA Ready for 2016 Legislative Session

GSRA's legislative team lays out the association's plans for this year's legislative session, including goals for the session and plans to coordinate with other organizations who share similar issues.

With the General Assembly beginning its 2016 session, GSRA's legislative team headed by Liaison Chuck Clay has prepared to advance GSRA's goals. These include encouraging new desired bills and provisions, supporting positive bills carried over from last session, and working to contain and defeat bills detrimental to our membership. Our plans are to:

- Support GSRA 2016 goals enumerated in President Kip Mann's Nov. 24 message to the membership, including its three attachments, [GSRA Future Plans and Strategy](#), [GSRA Information for Legislators](#), [GSRA Legislative Tool Kit](#). These goals include:
  - Supporting HB 240 (GSRA's DCH bill) and SB 145 (provides for at least one member of the Board of Community Health to also be a member of the SHBP),

- Working to obtain funding for at least a minimum cost of living adjustment, and
- Continuing to advocate keeping HB 383 (removes protections in alternative investments law) buried in committee.
- Oppose bills of concern still in play from last session. These are HB 445 (reduces income taxes but increases sales taxes to the detriment of retirees among others), HR 305 (amends Constitution to arbitrarily limit the state budget's rate of growth), HR 502 (allows revenues derived from fees or assessments to be dedicated solely for the purpose for which they were imposed), and HB 689 (prohibits state funding for cost of retiree's health insurance for either new retirees or new employees). Fortunately, SB 152 (creates a "GSEPS" plan for new TRS members) is NOT in play because the joint retirement committees did not vote to request a fiscal note for it, and



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- Watch for and be wary of bills that have not yet been filed but may concern us. These include but are not limited to converting our defined benefit health insurance to a defined contribution basis, other "tax reform" plans that result in members paying more in taxes, and other matters as they arise.

Our monitoring of bills has already begun with our review of bills "prefiled" before the session. As of Jan. 8, none of the prefiles appear to concern us.

As in past years, our Liaison and members of GSRA's legislative committee are closely coordinating with many other organizations of current and retired state employees and education professions. The committee is headed by chair Chuck Freedman, John Keys and Bill Tomlinson. We are also continuing our effort from last year to expand GSRA members' participation in this process. This includes having each chapter designate a legislative contact, providing the contacts with frequent updates from our legislative monitoring process, having the contacts update their chapters with this information, and using them to

encourage chapter members' contacts with legislators to advance GSRA's legislative goals and objectives.

A backbone of our efforts will be our annual *GSRA Day at the Capitol* on February 3rd and our legislative reception that evening. Please make every effort to attend these two functions as described in other newsletter articles.

Of course, when your Legislative Liaison and/or committee members learn of potential movements of critical bills where legislators need "encouragement" to take the proper actions, we will immediately involve you through our action alert process. At such time, your contact with your legislators will be essential in helping them make the right decisions.

But you do not have to, and should not, wait for us if you learn of a bill that impacts us. As several of you already have, feel free to contact us right away with any legislative concern at [legislation@mygsra.com](mailto:legislation@mygsra.com) or [help@mygsra.com](mailto:help@mygsra.com).

This is the time every year where your GSRA membership pays its dividends. Continue to be informed and be active for everyone's benefit.

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## Gov. Deal's State of the State

GSRA provides highlights of interest to retirees from the Governor's recent State of the State speech.

Governor Nathan Deal presented the 2016 State of the State message to the General Assembly on January 13, 2016. He phrased his message as the "condition of our Ship of State." Although the Governor's message is fairly lengthy, excerpts of interest from the speech are being presented in the following paragraphs.

"When I addressed you for the first time in January 2011, Georgia's Ship of State had been severely battered for

two years by the storms of the Great Recession. Our reserves, that is our Rainy Day Fund, had been almost completely depleted in an attempt to keep our Ship of State from sinking. Over \$1.4 billion from that fund had been used during that two-year period, and. . . . Our Revenue had dropped by \$2.3 billion from 2007 to 2011. Our unemployment rate was 10.4 percent. . . . Our high school graduation rate was an unacceptable 67.5 percent. . . .

“As we contemplate modernizing our education system, it is important to acknowledge the progress we have made over the past five years. Our graduation rate from high school has increased by over 11 percent to 78.8%, an average change of 3.83 percent each year. As significant as that increase is, during that same five years, our dropout rate has remained unyieldingly stagnant at an average of 3.6 percent. . . . 96,660 students dropped out of school between 2011 and this school year. . . . we must continue to bring that dropout number down.

“Because of the magnitude of the [Education Reform Commission] recommendations . . .some statutory changes will be necessary to implement them fully. . . .my proposed budget provides funds to implement a new compensation model for our Pre-K programs in order to retain lead teachers, increase assistant teacher salaries and maintain classroom quality. The Pre-K budget recommendation is in excess of \$358 million, which includes \$26.2 million for salary increases and an additional \$79 million for a 3 percent merit pay increase.

“[As] we continue to discuss the recommendations of the Education Reform Commission, it is important for teachers and administrators to know that just because we are examining ways to more appropriately allocate taxpayer dollars and put in place different models to achieve better education results, it does not mean that you are not appreciated. . . .

“I fully understand that there are many factors that impact test scores and graduation rates, and many of these are not within the control of our teachers. . . .

Now that the federal government has given states greater latitude regarding testing of students, I call on our State Department of Education and local school systems to evaluate their testing requirements. . . . tests that are duplicative and do not enhance educational achievement should be abolished. . . .

“As you know our mandatory entitlement spending continues to grow through no fault of our own. Although we have seen our revenue grow, we have also seen mandated expenditures grow in the areas of health care and education, taking up ever larger segments of our overall annual budgets. In fact, the discretionary portion of the budget, which is now roughly 17 percent, continues to shrink.

“Rising health care costs continue to be a major factor. Consider our State Health Benefit Plan. The state currently contributes \$842 million for health care coverage for state employees while also paying over \$1 billion for the employer share of health insurance for teachers in FY 2015.

“On top of that, we must also fund the state’s Medicaid program and its growing rolls. The cost of the program has grown from \$2.6 billion in FY 2013 to \$3.1 billion in FY 2017, an increase of 15.7 percent. Medicaid and PeachCare spending per Georgia family amounts to \$1,258 per annum. And when federal and other costs are added to this number, it amounts to at least \$4,365 each year. . . .

“[W]e have prioritized rewarding state employees for their hard work. Just as we are budgeting for a three percent pay raise for teachers, we are also including a three percent pay raise for all other state employees. Many of them have worked very hard as the Great Recession required the state to significantly cut the budgets of the agencies for which they work. In addition, they are seeing the number of fellow workers drop. There are four agencies that had over a 20 percent annual turnover rate, with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities losing almost one third of their employees last year. System wide, the turnover rate last year was 18.4 percent. For those agencies with the highest turnover rate, the budget allocates additional funds to be used to raise pay scales in addition to the overall three percent increase. . . .

“Another important agency of State Government that is often overlooked is the Georgia National Guard. In addition to being recognized as the nation’s No. 1 Army Guard unit in 2013, more than 18,000 of our guardsmen and women have been deployed since 9/11, some 964 of them last year alone. They serve our state both at home and abroad with distinction, and they deserve our unfailing gratitude for their valor. . . .

“To the members of the General Assembly, may God grant you wisdom as you deliberate during this legislative session. . . . “

GSRA will monitor and provide additional information as the FY 2016 amended and FY 2017 budgets move through the Session.



## Kip's View: Your Help Needed to Promote Legislative Goals

GSRA's President Kip Mann provides a check list of crucial steps GSRA members need to perform to help make this legislative session as successful for state retirees as possible.

"Here is your next assignment!" (Just add Mr. Phelps and you could be in the first scenes for the TV show **Mission Impossible**. The one starring Peter Graves who looks more like us!—not Tom Cruise.) However, it is my sincere hope that this year's legislative session should be entitled **Mission Possible**, but it will only happen with your support and action.

This year's legislative session started Monday, January 11, 2016. By now each of you should have contacted your local legislators and made them aware of our issues before they left home. Now for your next actions:

### GSRA Member's Check List

(Check off (✓) as you complete)

- Make plans to attend GSRA Legislative Day at the Capitol (No fee required) and the GPSHA/GSRA Reception for Legislators (registration of \$37 required) on February 3, 2016. Daytime activities begin at 9:30 a.m. and the reception is from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Go to GSRA's website at [www.myGSRA.com](http://www.myGSRA.com) to register online or print out the registration form and submit by mail.

- Respond to the Action Alert you will receive in a few days by following the instructions on the Action Alert and sending an e-mail to your Senator and Representative inviting them to the Reception the evening of February 3, 2016. The action alert will send the e-mail for you so this will be very easy.
- Attend Legislative Day at the Capitol and the Legislative Reception that evening.

Remember GSRA's success in achieving our 2016 legislative issues may depend on your efforts as may your future pension and health insurance benefits. This is our most important activity of the year to achieve our Legislative Objectives and protect our interests. Your support is needed.

Without your help, "**This message will self-destruct in five seconds!**" So get busy!

Kip Mann  
GSRA President

## Please Invite Your Legislators!

- Make this year's GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception a resounding success.
- Respond to the Action Alert you received on January 15th and invite your legislators to attend.
- Just a few clicks and you're done.
- Be sure to personalize the message if you can't attend yourself.
- The Action Alert process makes it easy to personalize your message.

**Take Action and help us help you!**

## OCTOBER – DECEMBER NEW MEMBERS

Name	County		Name	County		Name	County
<b>October</b>			Alan Powell	Hart		Alma Jean Grubbs	Montgomery
Robert Allen	Brantley		Gene Smith	Clarke		<b>December</b>	
Virginia Bonnough	Morgan		Linda Sue Graves	Dekalb		Doris Clark	Thomas
Debra Dickens	Oconee		Sherry K. Bailey	Dougherty		Billy Cobb	Douglas
Geraldine Moreland	Dekalb		Sydney Bowen	Thomas		Debbie Goff	Tift
Janice Murray	Clarke		Cathy Cox-Breakfield	Fannin		Kathy Hunt	Polk
Dennis Parsons	Chatham		Charles G. Barnes	Troup		Margaret Pethel	Fulton
Paula McAleer	Chatham		Donna Comacho	Chatham		Donna Snipes	Coffee
Randolph Williams	Walton		Larona Cook	Chatham		Thomas Tatum	Chatooga
<b>November</b>			Gerald Flowers	(Florida)		Ida Vaughn	Muscogee

### Don't Forget Your AMBA Benefits!

We encourage you to view the benefits available to you as a member of GSRA by visiting our contracted vendor, [www.myAMBAbenefits.info/association/gsra](http://www.myAMBAbenefits.info/association/gsra). You will see many discounted products (electronics, vacation) and benefits, such as long-term care or dental insurance.



### Let us Help You

For your questions or concerns about anything related to GSRA:

Call: 770-312-2799

Email: [help@mygsra.com](mailto:help@mygsra.com)

**We'll do our best to help!**

### Pay Your Dues the Easy Way

- **Have your GSRA dues deducted from your ERS retirement benefit**
- **It's simple and keeps you from having to send a check or renew online**
- **Just go to [www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com) or call GSRA at 770-317-2799 to obtain an authorization form**
- **Complete and mail it back according to the instructions**
- **Done!**

### GSRA Members!

Check out ERSGA/GTA's

MORE – My Official Rewards Experience

ERSGA retirees get discounts and incentives for:

- Travel
- Entertainment
- Shopping
- Recreation

Other areas tailored to your interests

You can access MORE by logging into your secure ERSGA account and clicking the link.

<https://secure.ers.ga.gov/>

### Endorsed GSRA Benefits

The Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA) makes many member only benefits available to its members. GSRA endorses the following member benefits:

- Long Term Care / Home Health Care Policy
- Life Insurance
- Medical Air Services Association (MASA)
- Travel Discounts
- Car Rental Discounts
- Tax-Deferred Annuity
- Cancer Treatment Policy
- Medicare Supplement Insurance
- Identity Theft Protection
- Hotel Discounts
- Computer Discounts

Review your benefits at: [www.myAMBAbenefits.info/gsra](http://www.myAMBAbenefits.info/gsra)



### Welcome SHBP RETIREES

We're back!

We are honored and look forward to serving you in 2015!



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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\* APR - Annual Percentage Rate. Loan rate is quoted as an Annual Percentage Rate and is subject to change without notice. Rate example is quoted for a 2010 or newer model year auto with a 36-month repayment period. Estimated monthly payment on a 36-month loan at 1.55% = \$29.00 per \$1,000.00 borrowed. Additional rates and terms are available. Ask for details. Rates shown are the lowest available for the listed term as of June 30, 2014. All loans are subject to approval of credit. Your actual rate is based upon your credit history. APCU is an Equal Opportunity Lender.