



Governor Deal and GSRA Members at the Capitol on February 3, 2016

GSRA Member Participation Improves Chances for 3% One-Time Benefit Adjustment/Creation of DCH Advisory Council!

Against the backdrop of *GSRA Day at the Capitol* and the *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception*, both GSRA leadership and members rallied around GSRA's top legislative goals for 2016 and made their voices heard to state leadership and the members of the State Legislature. Our efforts resulted in movement toward achieving BOTH our legislative goals.

First, the House Appropriations Committee's General Government Subcommittee approved, and the full

committee, under the able leadership of Chair Terry England, also approved inserting funds in the 2017 Appropriations Bill for a one-time 3% benefit adjustment for ERS retirees! Then, the full House immediately passed HB 751 on to the Senate! Coming on the heels of a successful member response to the Action Alert asking Governor Deal and the members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to consider granting a COLA to ERS retirees, the GSRA Day events became a very visible sign of ERS

retirees' concerns about their pensions not keeping pace with rising costs of living over the past eight years. The provision in HB 751 reads, "Recognize an increase in the employer share of the Employees' Retirement System contribution rate to provide a one-time benefit adjustment of 3% to retired state employees (Total Funds: \$3,499,963)."



Members get briefed before heading out to deliver information bags

Second, GSRA's good friend Rep. Debbie Buckner, who followed an expressed preference of the Speaker for a resolution instead of a bill, drafted a House resolution urging the department and board of community health to create the SHBP advisory council that GSRA has been advocating for several years. HR1382 includes all the related language of HB 240 regarding the council's purpose and composition as well as related processes. Rep. Buckner worked hard to obtain 51 co-signers, 20 of whom are Republicans. Concurrently, Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay is working with HB 240's author Brock Buzzway and possibly Health and Human Services Committee Chair Sharon Cooper to see if there is some way to move HB 240 out of the House.

So, congratulations on your good work! Much more is needed in the next month though to improve our chances of success. We will provide continuous status updates on Facebook. And PLEASE CONTINUE TO RESPOND TO ACTION ALERTS ON THESE MATTERS! Be friendly, respectful, courteous and GRATEFUL for legislators' help to date. What you have been doing is working, so don't let up now! As you receive responses, please send your information to Legislative Committee Chair Chuck Freedman at legislativechair@mygsra.com.

Battles is GSRA Legislative Service Award Recipient

At this year's *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* annual awards ceremony, both organizations recognized recipients who best supported the goals and ideals each association represents. GSRA presented its award to the legislator it felt had provided the most support to its goals in 2015, while GPHSA presented its awards to both a legislator and a private sector recipient.

GSRA President Kip Mann presented Representative Paul Battles with the *GSRA 2015 Legislative Services Award* for his work as Chairman of the House Retirement Committee, safeguarding retirement benefits and insuring that efforts to expand "risky investment" or curtail safeguards in the law allowing these type investments were not supported in the committee. President Mann thanked Representative Battles for his support and reiterated GSRA's appreciation for his continued work as Chairman of this important Committee. Mann also expressed the hope that Representative Battles will remain our friend as we push forward to achieve our 2016 Legislative Issues.



Rep. Paul Battles accepts award from GSRA President Kip Mann

GPHSA awarded its *Friend of Children 2016* awards to Representative David Clark and John Blend, III. Representative Clark was presented his award based on his service as the Chair of the House Study Committee on

Welfare Fraud, while John Blend, III was presented his award based on his involvement with a number of child serving centric groups, including the Goshen Valley Foundation, the Goshen Valley Boys Ranch and Together Georgia.

Also at the awards ceremony, a special appreciation proclamation was presented by GSRA to Wayne Drummond, Executive Director of the Georgia Professional Human Services Association (GPHSA). Drummond, who will be stepping down later this year, was recognized for his on-going work in promoting collaboration and partnership between the two organizations.



GSRA's Chuck Freedman (left) recognizes GPHSA Executive Director Wayne Drummond

GSRA Day at the Capitol: A Personal Account

Kevin Burke, a GSRA member of the Central Metro local chapter, attended the GSRA Day at the Capitol events earlier this month. Burke, who spent his 34 year state career as a Computer Programmer/Analyst at both DOAS (DFCS systems) and GDOL (Property and Supply Inventory systems), agreed to provide his perspective as a GSRA member for both events. Following is his account:

Despite the predicted rain during rush hour in Atlanta, I was able to park near the Capitol in the Capitol Lot at 8:30 a.m. and pay via the Parkmobile smartphone app without leaving my car. I then met our group in front of the North Wing stairs where we were to have the group photo with Gov. Deal at 9:30 a.m. During the time leading up to the photo, our group had the opportunity to mix and discuss our very important agenda for the day and strategy in general for the 2016 legislative session. Foremost in everyone's minds was GSRA's request for a 2016 (and beyond) COLA for ERS retirees. It turned out to be one of the best opportunities we would have during the day to meet as a group and discuss our issues in an informal setting.

After our photo with the governor, we all walked to the Coverdell Legislative Office Building (CLOB) to Room 406 to be briefed on our agenda and the day's activities. Along with other local chapter members, I picked up promotional bags to deliver to my legislative representatives. After

delivering the bags, I went to the Twin Towers cafeteria to eat lunch for the first time in many years. This was an opportunity to reconnect with several former co-workers and old friends.

At 1:30 p.m., I joined what turned out to be an excellent turnout of GSRA members for the planned Governmental Affairs Retirement Committee Meeting in Room 606 of the Capitol Legislative Office Building. It was obvious that our numbers made an impression on the committee as they conducted their business. Following the meeting, we had yet another good opportunity to discuss our issues among ourselves and with some of the committee members.

With a little time left before the start of the Joint GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception at 5:00 PM in the Floyd Building/20th Floor/Empire Room, I decided to sit in the Senate gallery to observe the day's business. As always, this was very interesting (and entertaining!).

At 4:20 p.m., I headed over to the Legislative Reception in order to meet and greet legislators as they arrived. The hors d'oeuvres and beverages were delicious, and during the time before the awards program was to begin at 6:00, I had a chance to chat with several legislators, GSRA attendees, and DFCS acquaintances whom I had not seen in years.

Finally, as in past years, the awards program was outstanding and appreciated by those receiving our thanks, as well as all in attendance.



Kip's View: GSRA Day Events a Big Success!

GSRA President Kip Mann provides his perspective of the *GSRA Day at the Capitol* and *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* events and their impact on GSRA's 2016 Legislative goals.

As of today, February 20, 2016, it is apparent that members of the House have heard our request to off-set the lack of a COLA since 2008, and the rising cost of living, and have responded with a 3% one-time annual adjustment, or thirteenth payment of retirement benefits based on 3% of a retiree's annual retirement benefit. This is very good news!

From where I sit, member efforts at the Capitol on February 3rd were a big part of our efforts that contributed to the action taken by Chair Terry England and the House Appropriations Committee and then by the full House to address the issue of ERS retirees' need for an adjustment to their retirement benefits. The steps of the Capitol were packed with our members while we waited for the appearance of the Governor and our picture with him!

Then the meeting room in the Legislative Office Building was filled to capacity as our members eagerly received instructions and information to pass on and deliver to legislators. The halls of the Capitol were abuzz with our 2016 Legislative Issues. Talk about COLAs for ERS retirees, a 3% across the board raise for active employees and teachers, the establishment of a Department of Community Health Advisory Board to provide consumer input into SHBP Health Plan options before enactment, and the need to limit so called "risky investments" and protect safeguards currently in investment policy regarding with regards to ERS retirement fund investments were heard echoing from the committee meeting room walls, the halls of the Capitol, and the Empire Room of the Floyd Towers where the *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* took place.

The reception that evening had over 80 GSRA members or partners in attendance and 61 legislators in attendance. In all, approximately 250+ people attended the event. In moving among the crowd and listening to small group discussions it was obvious our issues were receiving lively

discussion and support. The issue of a COLA for ERS retirees was the most spirited discussion, with some legislators concerned about whether or not it could be successfully addressed. This highlighted our need for further information to be distributed in this area.

Representative Paul Battles, Chairman of the House Retirement Committee, was the recipient of our Legislative Service Award for his support for ERS retirees' last year in preventing the introduction of legislation to add further options to the list of "risky investments" that could be considered for our ERS Retirement fund, and to prevent dilution of the safeguards currently built into legislation governing these investments. Thank you Rep. Battles for your continued ongoing support!

Achievement of this and our other 2016 Legislative Issues has built on the work we, as GSRA members, and our collaborative partners have done earlier this year and in past years to achieve our goals and objectives. This has not been achieved overnight. After we adopted our Future Plans initiative at our Annual Meeting in Savannah, Georgia in August of 2015, we asked the Governor for his help in getting our plan implemented in September of 2015. We met with his staff and adjusted our 2016 Legislative Issues based on the Governor's input, and then presented our 2016 Legislative Issues to legislators between October and December 2015. We members wrote the Governor, the leadership, and various legislators about our need for COLAs in response to two action alerts, and we had our successful *GSRA Day at the Capitol* on February 3rd. Then, late last week we heard something good might be coming out of the House Appropriations Committee, but not until February 20, 2016 were we certain of what had actually been recommended by the committee and what the full House passed.

Now we should celebrate this accomplishment and thank our legislators in the House for what they have done. Then we need to contact our Senators and ask for their support. We must continue to be respectful, remain vigilant, and be ready to respond with information to support our issues as circumstances warrant for the remainder of the legislative session.

You, our members, have responded beyond anticipation, and we have been told your contacts have had an impact in bringing our issues to the legislators' attention. This has been an educational process for all involved, and the process is not over. A GSRA Issue Paper on the need for a COLA and Equity in how State Retirees are treated regardless of their retirement system will come out soon. Members will be asked again to let their legislators know about this resource and ask for their continued support.

The process of getting some adjustment added to this year's budget to cover the increased costs of living for ERS retirees that we have all faced since 2008 has been very difficult, especially when nothing was recommended by the ERS Board and funds were not included by the Governor in his 2017 Budget. Your efforts have gotten funds placed in the budget bill (HB 751) passed by the House. Now we need to thank our representatives and urge senators to vote to pass the House version of HB 751 with the 3% ERS retiree benefit adjustment funds included. If there's a difference in the House and Senate versions in the amount or how it is to be used, then the bill goes to Conference Committee and back to each house for passage. The bill will then be sent to the Governor for final approval, where it must clear the final

hurdle of the Governor's line-item veto authority. If all that happens, we get an adjustment to our retirement income; makes me tired just thinking about it! That, however, is the course we have to travel if we are to be successful this year!

What we must do from now on is:

- Be vigilant and watch for action alert calls to action for our salary "adjustment", creation of the SHBP advisory council, and other legislative goals;
- Respond with our comments to changing situations;
- Be consistent in what we say so no one can say we don't know what we want;
- Thank those that help us along the way; and
- Be courteous throughout the process!

I'm sure that we'll talk again in one format or another by Alert, on Facebook, or by Newsletter. Know that your Board is working for you, and that we appreciate your support.

In Memorium

GSRA learned with sorrow recently of the passing of GSRA charter member Barry Smith. Barry retired from the Department of Audits, where he was Director of Administration. Barry was always helpful, friendly, collegial, and hard-working, and he had great judgement. He is the second of the original members to die, with Jerry Crockett having passed in 2013. Their contributions are greatly missed!

Thank You!

The GSRA Board would like to give a big shout out to Janis Tidwell for her outstanding leadership and stewardship of the *GSRA Day at the Capitol* and *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* events 2014-2016! Janis has been tireless and innovative in her efforts to make these events the best they can be each year, and each year they have been getting better and better. **Thank you, Janis!**

In addition, Chuck Freedman, Wayne Drummond, and Donna Buffum also deserve thanks for their roles in helping put together *GSRA Day at the Capitol* and/or the *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception*.

GSRA Day in Pictures



GSRA Members!

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- Entertainment
- Shopping
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<https://secure.ers.ga.gov/>

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- 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
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Review your benefits at: www.myAMBAbenefits.info/gsra



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