



## 2016 Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Information

The Boards of Trustees for all ERS-administered systems meet each year at the Annual Board Meetings to hear an update of the financial status of the systems and approve the latest plan actuarial valuations. They also vote on whether to grant a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for the upcoming fiscal year.

At the 2014 ERS Annual Meeting, the Chair appointed a COLA Study Committee to craft a set of guidelines. These guidelines are intended to be used by the Boards in future years to help with their COLA considerations. At the most recent Annual Meeting, on April 16, 2015, the Study Committee presented the completed guidelines to the Boards. Following the presentation, the Boards each deliberated and all voted not to provide a COLA for FY 2016.

The decision on a COLA for FY 2017 is expected to be taken up by all Boards at the Annual Meetings on April 21, 2016.

Please click [here](#) to review the recommendations of the COLA Study Committee.

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## Tax Information

### Federal Withholding Changes

Generally, pension and annuity payments are subject to federal income tax withholding. Each year in January, ERSGA updates its systems' withholding tables to reflect the latest IRS guidance. These changes may impact your 2016 monthly net payment amounts.

Please access your payment advices on either the ERSGA [website](#) or through your bank account. This may also be a good time to review your tax withholding levels for 2016.

### Retirement Income Exclusion (GA Residents Only)

Taxpayers who are 62 or older, or permanently and totally disabled regardless of age, may be eligible for a retirement income adjustment on their **Georgia tax return**. Retirement income includes:

- Income from pensions and annuities
- Interest income
- Dividend income
- Net income from rental property
- Capital gains income
- Income from royalties

Please contact the Georgia Department of Revenue for more information on claiming the exclusion.

### 2015 Tax Documents – 1099s

If you received pension payments, a lump sum refund, or a death benefit during calendar year 2015, the payments are reported to the Internal Revenue Service, individual retirees, and beneficiaries on a Form 1099 (Form 1099-R for Qualified Plans and 1099-MISC for Non-Qualified Plans). Some retirees may receive more than one of the above listed forms if they received more than one type of payment, e.g., a payment as a beneficiary of another member's benefit and monthly benefit payments from their own retirement.

The 1099 shows the total amount of pension payments for the calendar year, as well as total federal and state income tax withheld. This document is necessary when filing your income tax returns. All 1099s will be mailed on or before January 29, 2016. The form will also be available through your *Retiree Account Access* at <https://secure.ers.ga.gov>.

When you receive your documents, **please review them carefully**. If you have any questions regarding your 1099, please contact our office.

### New Health and Dental Rates

2016 Health and Dental Insurance rates will go into effect December 31, 2015 for your January 2016 coverage. The new health and dental deductions will affect your December 2015 net benefit amount. Payment advices can be viewed from *Retiree Account Access* at <https://secure.ers.ga.gov> or through your bank account.

For more information about premium rates, please visit <http://team.georgia.gov/my-benefits/>.

### Month-of-Death Payments

As a retiree or beneficiary receiving a monthly pension benefit, you become eligible for your monthly payment on the first day of each month. Payment is then made at the end of that month. The payment for your month of death is payable to YOU, not to your beneficiary.

Once the final monthly payment has been deposited (or the final monthly check has been cashed), we consider that all monthly payments due to you have been made. If the final payment cannot be made to you, it will be payable to your Estate. If you do not have an Estate, and if the final payment is less than \$10,000, we will make your final payment to your heirs-at-law (spouse, children, parents, or siblings – in that order).

Please make sure your beneficiaries are aware that your final monthly benefit is payable to YOU (or to your Estate) and not to your beneficiaries.

The IRS website now has a page for Seniors and Retirees with a wide range of helpful information, including contribution limits, deductions, minimum distributions, scam alerts, and, of course, taxes!

Click [here](#) to check it out.

## *Rehired Retiree Reminder*

Georgia law limits retirees of ERS, JRS and LRS from returning to service for a covered employer for more than 1,040 hours per calendar year.

If you are a retiree returning to work for an employer, please take note of the following:

- It is your responsibility as an employee or contractor to notify your employer that you receive pension benefits
- Failure to notify your employer can result in overpaid pension benefits for which you will be responsible for repayment
- To meet the Independent Contractor Exception (see below), your employer must complete the certification form and file it with the retirement system
- A new Rehired Retiree Form must be submitted to the retirement system by each employer
- Keep track of your time – 1,040 hours is equivalent to approximately 6 months of full-time work
- Once you exceed the 1,040 hours, your benefits are suspended for the remainder of the calendar year
- Suspended benefits are automatically reinstated in January each calendar year
- The 1,040 hours limit resets in January each calendar year

The 1,040 hour work restriction generally applies to retirees who return to work as employees or independent contractors for “employers,” defined as follows under the law:

- State agencies or departments
- Bureaus, Boards, Commissions or Institutions of the state or any county, city-county or city board
- Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
- Retired member’s last employer that reported to the retirement system prior to retirement

### **Independent Contractors Exception**

Exceptions to the rehired retiree return to work rule include retirees of LRS returning to the General Assembly and contractors who meet the provisions of the Independent Contractor Exception as certified by their respective employer:

- The contracting entity has multiple employees;
- The contracting entity has multiple contracts and the contracts are not limited to employers as defined in O.C.G.A. 47-2-1; and
- The contractual relationship with the employer was not created to allow a retired employee to continue employment after retirement in a position similar to the one held before retirement.

### **Email Addresses**

It is important to keep your email address current with ERSGA in order to receive information and announcements we send throughout the year. You can make sure your email address is correct by going to [www.ers.ga.gov](http://www.ers.ga.gov), clicking account access, and logging into your account.



## Online Tools for Retirees

Did you know you can review and manage your monthly pension through our secure self-service website?

On our secure site, <https://secure.ers.ga.gov>, you can:

- View your payment information, including deductions for taxes and insurance
- View your 1099R(s) for tax filing
- View and update your tax withholding
- View or change your direct deposit information
- View your beneficiary information, including the pension option you elected at retirement
- Update your personal contact information, including your home address

Visit [www.ers.ga.gov](http://www.ers.ga.gov) and click on the *Account Access* button to register or log in to your account.

The screenshot shows the ERSGA website interface. At the top left is the ERSGA logo with the tagline "Employees' Retirement System of Georgia" and "Serving those who serve Georgia". Below the logo is a navigation bar with "home" and "logout" links. The main content area contains a security notice, a login section with "User ID:" and "Password:" labels and input fields, a "LOGIN" button, and a link for "Forgotten Login Information?". Below this is a "REGISTER" button and a link for "Click for Account Access Instructions". At the bottom, there is a contact information section for account access problems.

ERSGA  
Employees' Retirement System of Georgia  
Serving those who serve Georgia

home | logout

Keeping your account safe and secure is ERSGA's highest priority; therefore, this site incorporates internet security and encryption technology. There are precautions you should take to prevent unauthorized access to your account from your computer, such as carefully protecting your User ID and Password, and using firewall and spyware detection software. For more information, [click here](#).

If you are an ERSGA Retiree, or an Active/Inactive/Lost Member, and have already established an account, please log in by entering:

User ID:

Password:

**LOGIN**

[Forgotten Login Information? Click here.](#)

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If you have never registered, please click the Register button to establish your ERSGA account.

**REGISTER**

[Click for Account Access Instructions](#)

Should you encounter any problems accessing your account, please call ERSGA and report the difficulty. Questions about your account should be directed to an ERSGA Customer Service Representative at (404) 350-6300 or (800) 805-4609. You can also [email us](#) with feedback or suggestions. Thank you for your continued support.

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## *New Year's Resolution: Updating your Pension and Group Term Life Insurance (GTLI) Beneficiaries*

### **Pension**

When you retired, you selected a form of pension. If you selected a monthly benefit that continues to your beneficiary after your death, there are only a few specific circumstances under which you may be able to change that beneficiary and have your new beneficiary receive a monthly pension upon your death.

At [www.ers.ga.gov](http://www.ers.ga.gov), use the navigation panel on the left side of the screen and select the pension plan under which you retired (ERS, PSERS, etc.). Use the right navigation panel to choose "forms & publications". Under Publications you will find a Retirement Options Information Chart, which outlines the circumstances under which you may change your primary beneficiary(ies), and if you can change your form of pension. The notes at the bottom of the page provide detail about special situations that allow you to make such changes.

This information is also available on the second page of our *Retiree Change of Beneficiary Form*. If you are not sure, call our office and one of our Customer Care Representatives will be happy to help you. As a Retiree, you cannot change your beneficiary(ies) directly on our website; you will need to send us your changes in writing.

### **GTLI**

If you are covered under GTLI, you can update or change your beneficiaries at any time. You will need to do this in writing. Please complete the *Retiree Change of Beneficiary Form* (found under your Plan in Forms and Publications on our website) and mail it to us.

As a Retiree, you cannot change your beneficiary(ies) directly on our website. If you are not sure who you elected as your beneficiary(ies), you can view your selection online (account access) or contact us. It is important that we have your most current beneficiary information on file.

## *Did You Know You Get **MORE** at Retirement?*

ERSGA (in partnership with the Georgia Technology Authority) is pleased to present **MORE** - My Official Rewards Experience. This program offers ERSGA retirees discounts and incentives for shopping, travel, entertainment, dining, recreation, and other areas tailored to your interests.

Some facts about the **MORE** offering:

- **MORE** is being offered free of charge – it is free for registered retirees to use and save money.
- **MORE** does not use any ERSGA funds – your retirement funds are not being used to offer **MORE**.
- **MORE** is not a replacement for COLA and/or other offerings from GSRA, etc.
- **MORE** can be tailored to your needs – you can refer local businesses to participate.
- You can setup Alerts & Favorites in **MORE** to focus only on discounts & incentives you are interested in.

If you have not already registered to take advantage of all **MORE** has to offer, click the **MORE** link on the ERSGA homepage and start saving today!

## State Holidays

Our offices will be closed in observance of the following 2016 state holidays:

New Year's Day	Friday, January 1
State Holiday	January 19-will be observed on Friday, November 25
Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday	Monday, January 18
Washington's Birthday	February 15 -will be observed on Tuesday, December 27
State Holiday	April 26 -will be observed on Monday, April 25
Memorial Day	Monday, May 30
Independence Day	Monday, July 4
Labor Day	Monday, September 5
Columbus Day	Monday, October 10
Veterans Day	Friday, November 11
Thanksgiving Day	Thursday, November 24
Christmas Day	December 25 - will be observed on Monday, December 26

### Attention Georgia State Retirees!



The **Georgia State Retirees Association** is an organization established and maintained by state retirees for state retirees. We advocate for you and keep you thoroughly informed about any changes or impacts to your benefits from a state retiree perspective through our:

Monthly Newsletter  
Media Sites  
Annual Meeting  
Legislative Liaison Team  
Action Alerts  
GSRA Day at the Capitol  
Local Chapters

**Join your fellow retirees and help us help you**

Website: [www.myGSRA.com](http://www.myGSRA.com)  
Facebook: [Georgia State Retirees Association](https://www.facebook.com/GeorgiaStateRetireesAssociation)  
Phone: 770-312-2799

## Tech Tip



Our world has become a global community, interconnected and accessible from virtually anywhere at any time. While the convenience and positive benefits of such an interconnected world are enormous, they come with a healthy dose of risk as well. There are some simple things you can do to help ensure your safety, protect your identity, and safeguard your activities. These include:

- **Strong Passwords** – This is one of the easiest and most frequently overlooked ways to protect yourself online. Don't use common names or words for passwords. Passwords with special characters (such as !@#\$\$%^&\*) and/or a combination of letters and numbers, as well as upper case and lower case letters, while more difficult to remember, are also much harder to guess or crack.
- **Multiple Passwords** – This is another case where it makes life slightly more difficult for you, but offers substantial protection. Do not use the same password at multiple places. You don't want to be in a situation where if, for example, your iTunes account is hacked, the hacker also has the password to your online banking or investment accounts, bill payment sites, etc. Use different passwords for different sites.
- **Install and keep anti-virus software up to date** – Most PCs today come with some version of an anti-virus program. If it doesn't, there are good free options available, such as AVG, Avast, SpyBot, or Panda. Also remember that it's not good enough to just install it and forget it. You must keep the software updated. Most anti-virus programs have an option to allow them to automatically download and update the virus definitions.
- **Be Skeptical** – Just like in life, there are some bad actors on the internet. A good dose of skepticism will go a long way toward protecting you online. Do not click on suspicious emails or attachments. If you get an email from someone you don't know or you get a curious attachment, simply delete it. Do NOT open attachments, as this is how most viruses are transmitted. If you're really not sure, contact the sender and ask if they sent you something.

A few simple steps and a small amount of effort on your part can help to ensure your online experiences are safe and enjoyable!

