



PSERS Retired Member Newsletter

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Message from the Executive Director

Before serving as PSERS' Executive Director, I worked for the School District of Philadelphia and was a PSERS member for almost eight years. That experience continues to shape my perspective and helps me keep members at the center of our work as we strengthen the agency.

At the same time, my experience working at PSERS has given me insights that I didn't have as a member. There are several things I wish I had known.

- **The reach of PSERS is remarkable.** PSERS serves more than *half a million* people – roughly 1 in 25 Pennsylvanians – with members in every county across Pennsylvania. Very few organizations can claim such a broad and meaningful reach.
- **Serving members is a significant responsibility.** Partnering with so many people for their retirement needs is both a privilege and a serious responsibility. Shortly after becoming the Executive Director, I visited every regional office and saw firsthand the commitment, knowledge, and professionalism our employees bring to their work in serving our members. Whether assisting members in person, over the phone, or online, our staff are focused on providing the information and support members need throughout their retirement journey. As a member, I appreciated PSERS services, but I did not fully understand the depth of commitment behind them or how much they could have helped me navigate my own retirement questions.
- **PSERS offers valuable resources at no cost.** I did not fully appreciate the range of free resources PSERS offers. Members have access to a secure Member Self-Service (MSS) portal that gives 24-hour access to a variety of services, such as viewing correspondence and newsletters, updating contact information, nominating a beneficiary, and generating retirement estimates. PSERS also provides retirement estimate calculators, publications, and both in-person and virtual presentations – all designed to help answer questions, prepare for retirement and build financial knowledge.

As you enjoy your retirement, please know that PSERS remains committed to serving you. Our dedicated staff are available to answer your questions, provide assistance, and help you navigate through retirement.

PSERS Board of Trustees Meetings

Board Meeting Schedule:

October 22-23, 2026

December 17-18, 2026

Visit PSERS' website for the detailed schedule of Board and Committee meetings.

Board meetings are held in Harrisburg at PSERS, located at 5 N 5th Street.

In addition to Board meetings, Committee meetings are held throughout the year. All PSERS Board meetings are live streamed and open to the public.

For exact meeting times or if you would like to attend and require an accommodation to participate, please contact Tivia Danner, PSERS Executive Office at tidanner@pa.gov.

Message from the Executive Director...continued

One of the most common questions we hear from PSERS retirees is, "When will I get a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)?" We were pleased to share with you that the General Assembly passed legislation as part of the Commonwealth's fiscal year 2026-27 budget that was signed into law by Gov. Josh Shapiro. That legislation gives a COLA to PSERS members who retired on or before July 1, 2001. You'll find more information about the COLA in this newsletter. And know that staff are working diligently to get the COLA payment out as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Uri Monson

PSERS' Executive Director

Cost-of-Living Adjustment for Members Who Retired On or Before July 1, 2001

A cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for PSERS members who retired on or before July 1, 2001, was passed by the General Assembly as part of the Commonwealth's fiscal year 2026-27 budget. The COLA – a permanent, supplemental percentage increase to the member's benefit – was signed into law by Gov. Josh Shapiro on July 12, 2026, as part of Act 21 of 2026.

Who is eligible?

- The COLA is payable only to PSERS members who retired on or before July 1, 2001 (Pre Act 9 of 2001 benefit enhancements) and who were receiving a monthly benefit payment on July 1, 2026.
- Members with a retirement date after July 1, 2001, and beneficiaries and survivor annuitants of members who passed prior to July 1, 2026, are not eligible.

Eligible retirees will be notified prior to the increase in their monthly benefit payment.

Why weren't all retired members given a COLA?

COLAs provided to PSERS retirees can only be authorized by the General Assembly and the Governor through the enactment of legislation. PSERS has no authority to increase a member's pension that is not in the law.

The 2026 COLA only provides an increase to members who retired on or before July 1, 2001. Members who retired after July 1, 2001, are not eligible for the COLA. Notably, Act 9 of 2001 raised retirement benefits for state and public school employees by almost 25%.

When will the COLA be effective?

The COLA is effective July 1, 2026.

When will the COLA be included in benefit payments?

Eligible retirees will receive the COLA effective July 1, 2026.

Most eligible retirees received the new COLA adjusted monthly benefit amount plus the retroactive COLA payments for July and August in their Sept. 30, 2026, payment. The October payment for these retirees will be their new COLA adjusted monthly benefit that they will receive for life.

Approximately 3% of eligible retirees will not receive their COLA increase in September due to special circumstances that require additional review and processing. Those eligible retirees will be notified of their eligibility to receive the COLA.

How much is the increase?

This COLA increased benefits between 15% and 24.5%, depending on the member's retirement date. More information is available on [the PSERS website](#).

Thinking about Working for a Public School after Retirement?

The Retirement Code prohibits retirees from returning to school service in a Pennsylvania public school in any capacity, full-time, part-time, year-round, or seasonal, while receiving a PSERS retirement benefit. If you are a PSERS retiree and decide to work for a Pennsylvania public school, including, but not limited to, a charter school, a community college, or a State-owned university, you must be reenrolled in PSERS and your monthly retirement benefit must stop. You may be eligible to continue to receive your monthly retirement benefit and not be reenrolled in PSERS *only if* one of the exceptions listed below applies. Your employer must submit an approval request to PSERS for one of the following exceptions to ensure your benefit is not suspended.

- **Personnel Shortage** – A shortage of appropriate subject-certified teachers or other personnel, substantiated by the employer and approved by PSERS. Certain requirements and time restrictions apply.
- **Emergency that Increases the Workload** – An unforeseen emergency which increases the workload and creates a serious impairment of service to the public, substantiated by the employer and approved by PSERS. An emergency is not caused by a personnel shortage and must be the result of unexpected and additional, unforeseen work. Certain requirements and time restrictions apply.
- **Extracurricular Position** – An extracurricular position under a separate written contract that expressly waives PSERS membership. Certain contractual and schedule restrictions apply.
- **Independent Contractor** – Contractual arrangement with a school employer as a bona fide independent contractor.
- **Employment with a Third-Party Employer** – Employment when validly employed by, and providing services through, a legitimate third-party employer that is not a reporting unit of PSERS.
- **Enrollment in Alternate Retirement Plan** – Enrollment in an alternate retirement plan (e.g., State Employees' Retirement System or Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association) through employment with any of the

state's community colleges, Pennsylvania State University, or the 14 state-owned universities. Special rules may apply for employment in a community college, public university, or Pennsylvania charter school.

These exceptions are detailed in the [Return to Service Exceptions \(Publication #9682\) handbook](#) available on the PSERS website.

Before beginning service, you must determine whether your employer is a PSERS participating employer and, if so, you must confirm with the employer that your return is approved by PSERS under one of the exceptions. PSERS will provide written approval to the employer that you should request a copy of. A list of employers with a school year approval is available on the PSERS website under Member Resources>Retired Members>Working After Retirement.

If you are approved to return to service under one of the exceptions, your annuity will not stop but you will not be eligible to earn or purchase service credit for the period of time you render service. If PSERS determines that your return does not qualify under any of these exceptions, your monthly payment will be stopped as of the day you first returned to service and you will again become an active, contributing member of PSERS. **You will also be required to pay back the benefit you received, if any, following the effective date of your return to service.**

Please contact PSERS if you have questions about returning to service.

Your Form 1099-R is Coming in January

In January, PSERS will send you a *Form 1099-R* that reflects the total payments you received from PSERS during the previous calendar year. The form should be used to prepare your annual federal income tax return. Members who have paperless delivery through PSERS Member Self-Service (MSS) Portal will receive their *Form 1099-R* sooner than those who do not have paperless delivery.

Last year, PSERS sent nearly **100,000 Forms 1099-R** electronically. Members with paperless delivery will receive an email when their form is available. Regardless of whether you have paperless delivery, your *Form 1099-R* will be available electronically through your MSS account on the "My Documents" page.

Ensure Access to Your Form 1099-R

PSERS' call volumes and wait times can triple in the beginning of the year, so now is a good time to check your access to your MSS account to ensure that you can get your *Form 1099-R*. Don't wait until the last minute!

For members who don't have MSS access, keeping your mailing address up to date is important to ensure you receive your *Form 1099-R*. Additionally, PSERS sometimes receives requests for a deceased member's *Form 1099-R*. We send the form to the last known address on file for the member.

Don't have an MSS Account? Register today!

You only need your PSERS ID, Social Security number, date of birth, and a valid email address to get started. If you do not have your PSERS ID, you can connect with PSERS at 1-888-773-7748 to have your ID mailed to you.

Option Selection Period in October for Health Options Program Participants

This fall, the Health Options Program is mailing important information about retiree health care coverage to PSERS members enrolled in the Health Options Program and to those becoming eligible for the Health Options Program when they turn 65.

If you are enrolled in the Health Options Program, you can change your medical and/or prescription drug coverage for 2027 during this fall's Option Selection Period. If you are enrolled in, or plan to enroll in, the HOP Medical Plan or Value Medical Plan and do not currently have **MetLife Dental and EyeMed Vision Option**, you can elect it for 2027.

To help you decide, the Health Options Program will send you a personalized statement and instructions for making 2027 coverage changes. Members currently enrolled in the Medicare Plus Rx Option or the Medicare Standard Rx Option will also receive information about those plans. If you need a copy of the information, go to the **2027 Option Selection Period page** on HOPbenefits.com.

If you're a PSERS retiree turning age 65 during the first six months of 2027, we'll send you a personalized package of information that describes the medical, prescription drug, and dental and vision benefits available through the Health Options Program, including monthly premiums for all your coverage options. If you don't want to wait for your package to arrive, visit discoverHOPbenefits.com to explore your options.

You can also attend an information session to learn more about your coverage options. This October and November, in-person meetings will be held throughout Pennsylvania. The schedule and instructions for how to register are posted to discoverHOPbenefits.com.

Are You Losing Health Insurance Coverage? PSERS Can Help!

Unlike health care programs created for the public, the Health Options Program is designed specifically for PSERS retirees. If you are not currently enrolled in the PSERS Health Options Program and your health coverage ends through no fault of your own, you may be able to enroll.

The Health Options Program offers eligible retirees guaranteed access to benefits, with no medical exam or health questions. Eligible members may receive an employer subsidy (also called [Premium Assistance](#)) of up to **\$100 per month** to help pay the premium. Once you're enrolled, premiums don't increase based on your age or health status.

Visit HOPbenefits.com to learn more about your options or attend an information session. This October and November, in-person meetings will be held throughout Pennsylvania. The schedule and registration instructions are posted to [the Information Sessions page](#) on the HOP website discoverHOPbenefits.com.

When you are ready to enroll, download an [application form](#) from the HOP website or call the HOP Administration Unit at 1-800-773-7725 for help.

Teacher of the Year Leon Smith Starts Each Day with a Powerful Message to His Students

Each day when Leon Smith walks into his classroom, he knows he can make a difference in a student's life.

"I know you. I believe in you."

For Smith, those aren't just words of encouragement. They're a promise he makes to every student who enters his classroom.

Smith, a social studies teacher at Haverford High School in Delaware County, has spent 25 years helping students discover not only history but also confidence in themselves. He teaches Advanced Placement U.S. History, Advanced Placement African American Studies, and Honors Social Studies.



He was recently named 2026 National Teacher of the Year after earning Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year honors in 2025. This PSERS member believes some of life's most important lessons aren't just found in textbooks. They are found in helping students build a community where they feel seen, valued, and capable of reaching their fullest potential.

"As a teacher, you get to be that person a student will never forget," Smith said. "If you make that connection and inspire your students, they will learn you believe in them and they will then believe in themselves."

Building those connections begins before the day's lessons. Smith starts teaching with a classroom circle where students talk about their goals, favorite music, or something happening in their lives.

While the classroom circle may seem simple, Smith said it plays an important role in learning and brain development. The practice is rooted in psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which suggests students learn best after they feel safe, connected, and valued.

The philosophy Smith uses in his classroom was shaped by a teacher who made a lasting impact on his own life.

As a first grader adjusting to a new school, Smith met his teacher, Ms. Mason, who helped him feel seen and believed in his potential. Years later, student teacher Mr. Haines became the first black educator Smith encountered in the classroom, helping him see himself as a teacher for the first time.

"When students have a mirror in someone in their class such as a teacher, it can provide a motivating factor for them to learn," Smith said.

Beyond teaching history, Smith said he hopes his students also learn empathy.

"No one can fully understand what someone is going through on a daily basis," Smith said. "As humans we have challenges and we need to give people grace. I want my students to try to give each other grace and we can learn and grow together."

Smith also hopes to inspire the next generation of educators by encouraging young people to consider teaching. That way, he hopes more students will one day discover the same calling and help teach a child that they matter.

"I've always felt like education was my mission," Smith said. "I look back on my life, and I feel like I've always had a calling for it."

2027 Payment Calendar

Your monthly retirement benefit is paid on the last business day of the month for which they are due. Because PSERS group health insurance premiums are payable in advance, your medical deduction is for the next month.

Benefit for Month of:	Paid on:	Deduction of Medical Premium for:
January	Jan. 29	February
February	Feb. 26	March
March	March 31	April
April	April 30	May
May	May 28	June
June	June 30	July
July	July 30	August
August	Aug. 31	September
September	Sept. 30	October
October	Oct. 29	November
November	Nov. 30	December
December	Dec. 31	January 2028

Missing Direct Deposit Payments

Payments sent via direct deposit (Electronic Fund Transfer [EFT]) to your financial institution should be in your account on the last business day of the month. Always check to ensure your electronic deposit is in your account on that date. If it is not, contact your financial institution to make sure the delay was not within its system. If you recently enrolled in or submitted a change to direct deposit with PSERS, verify with your financial institution the account number and routing number that you submitted to PSERS. You can view and update your direct deposit information in your Member Self-Service (MSS) account.

Payments mailed to your home address may take additional time to reach you. Contact PSERS if your check does not arrive by the 10th of the following month. For example, if your January check has not arrived by Feb. 10, please contact PSERS. Waiting until the 10th of the month allows the post office sufficient time to forward your check to you or reroute misdirected mail. You should contact PSERS immediately if you believe that your check was stolen or destroyed.

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**Important Information from the
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Public School Employees' Retirement System**



Website
pa.gov/PSERS

Register for PSERS' Member Self-Service (MSS) Portal to access your retirement account online, anytime!



Call or Fax

Toll-Free: 1-888-773-7748

Local Calls: 717-787-8540

Fax: 717-772-3860



**Send us a Secure Message
through your MSS Account!**

Don't have an MSS Account?
Complete the Contact Form on our
website.



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