

Members Represent at GSRA Day!

Bolstered by a great turnout and good weather, the 2017 *GSRA Day at the Capitol* and *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* events held February 1, 2017 gave GSRA members two great forums for providing our state elected officials with information and education related to GSRA's goals and objectives for this year, while demonstrating the association's/members' commitment to ensuring that legislators never forget the promises made to state employees regarding their retirement benefits. In addition, both events provided members with the opportunity to connect with former co-workers and old friends, as well as get up to the minute news on the status of legislation of interest and impact to state retirees.



Members wait for their picture with the Governor

Members first met at the State Capitol in the morning for a photo op with Governor Nathan Deal before convening in the Legislative Office Building for an update session with GSRA leadership and the Legislative Liaison team. Kip Mann, GSRA President, opened the proceedings by welcoming members and providing an overview of the day's events. Kip then turned the program over to Chuck Freedman, Chair of GSRA's Legislative Committee, who provided attendees with the current status of legislation of interest to members and retirees and John Keys, who

reminded members of the best way to communicate with and educate their state legislators.



President Kip Mann addresses members

Once the update was complete, members began gathering up the bags of GSRA information and promotional items to deliver to their (and other) legislators. For the next hour or so, Capitol Hill was alive with GSRA members distributing the bags to every senator and representative. After an open lunch period, many members came back to the Capitol to attend a meeting of the House Retirement Committee. Representative Paul Battles, Chair of the committee, welcomed a standing room only group of GSRA members to the proceedings. While the brief meeting did not deal with any matters pertaining to ERS retirees, it was interesting to watch and, more importantly, remind committee members of our association and interest.

Around 4:00 pm, members began to make their way over to the Empire Room of the West Floyd Tower in order to prepare for the *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception*. Once legislators and legislative staffers began showing up at 5:00, attendees were served a buffet of appetizers and finger foods, along with a variety of beverages. Members congregated at tables numbered to identify to legislators where they might find constituents from their districts. The

social setting allowed members the opportunity to thank their legislators for their service and to also share member concerns with their legislators in a relaxed environment.



GSRA Members Daniel Coffee and Dean Crist visit with Representative Patty Bentley, who represents District 139



GSRA Admin and member Donna Buffum visits with Representative John Corbett, District 174

Midway through the reception, both associations held an awards ceremony to recognize recipients who best supported the goals and ideals of each association in the past year. GSRA President Kip Mann presented Representative Terry England with the GSRA 2016 Legislative Service Award for his work as Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee in working to help ERS retirees receive a 3% one time adjustment (on up to \$30,000 of ERS pension benefits) in 2016, the first ERS pension adjustment

awarded in seven years. Because Representative England had a prior commitment, his friend and colleague, Representative Tommy Benton, accepted the award on his behalf. Then, GPHSA Executive Director Wayne Drummond presented the association's 2017 Friend of Children Award to Mike Angstadt, Executive Director of Twin Cedars Youth and Family Services, one of Georgia's best resources for families and children and a nationally recognized leader in service. Twin Cedars Youth and Family services is a non-profit organization serving more than 1800 babies, children, youth, and families each year. In addition to providing exceptional leadership for Twin Cedars, Mike was recognized for being a respected advocate for families and children and developing exceptional team building opportunities for groups of all types, including several for GPHSA. Following the awards ceremony, members and legislators continued to enjoy the reception.



Representative Tommy Benton accepts the GSRA 2017 Legislative Service Award from President Kip Mann on behalf of his friend and colleague, Representative Terry England

GSRA members who participated in this year's 2017 GSRA Day at the Capitol and GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception represented the association and their fellow members with diligence and enthusiasm. We all owe them a big "Thank You" for a job well done!

Session Starts With Some Promise for Retirees

February 15 marked the 18th legislative day. As of that date, few bills had passed either house with the notable exception of the amended FY 2017 budget which passed both houses. The “little” budget had little in it directly affecting retirees, including any funds that GSRA had requested to improve the funding ratio of the ERS pension fund. The “big” FY 2018 budget was still being considered by the House Appropriations Committee. It included monies requested by the Governor for a second consecutive 3% one-time adjustment for ERS retirees capped at \$900. GSRA representatives began working in November with House Appropriations Committee Chair Terry England and other legislators to obtain increased funding for at least a 1% COLA. Of course, participating GSRA members advocated during *2017 GSRA Day at the Capitol* and our legislative reception.

In other fronts, GSRA has been working with our coalition of other ERS and TRS active and retired organizations on health insurance bills. SB 8 by Renee Unterman and HB 71 by Richard Smith seek to prevent “surprise” billing by out-of-network medical providers that can cost consumers hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars that they were not suspecting. The bills attack this problem differently in their provisions addressing advance disclosures, comparison shopping and other aspects. The present versions appear to place the burden on consumers to determine which providers are covered by their policies and to make decisions based on the disclosed information. The coalition supports the bills’ goals, but believes that their language places undue burdens on consumers to make informed decisions, particularly for nondiscretionary/emergency procedures when consumers do not have the time and/or are not in any mental condition to making such decisions. The coalition is working with the authors to have the bills include provisions for “default” level charges for various procedures so that consumers will not encounter such burden. As stated by Sen. Unterman, the process is difficult because of the conflicting interests of providers and insurance companies. Her committee and support groups are researching similar laws and experiences in other states for guidance.

HB 300 by Rep. Geoff Duncan would transfer the administration of the State Health Benefit Plan from DCH to DOAS and it would create federally qualified health centers and provide “incentives” for plan members to use the health centers. HB 300 also creates a 12-member advisory

panel which includes 2 SHBP employee/retiree members. While this bill appears to have several advantages, it potentially has significant disadvantages. GSRA will be obtaining further information and determining the best position to take on the bill. We will be aided by our good friend Rep. Debbie Buckner who is a bill sponsor.

There are a few retirement bills of interest. SB 131 by long-time supporter Sen. Josh McKoon is a reincarnation of our bill of several years running to create a DCH consumer advisory council composed only of retired and active ERS and TRS members, and to require that two members of the DCH board be SHBP retired/active ERS/TRS members. While GSRA appreciates the author’s intent and support, we are not certain of the need for this bill given our productive meeting in November with new DCH commissioner Frank Berry. GSRA has not taken position on the bill pending further consultation with the commissioner.

Rep. Howard Maxwell has introduced a couple of retirement bills, none of which directly impacts ERS retirees. However, HB 312 would authorize ERS to add a Roth IRA plan to its deferred compensation offerings, an addition that many of us would have found quite beneficial during our working years.

SB 101 was authored and introduced by Sen Ligon at the request of GSRA member Paul Medders. The bill would allow full-time hourly employees who were originally members of the ERS defined contribution plan to purchase time in our defined benefit plan for the full actuarial cost. At the request of GSRA, ERS executive director Jim Potvin has been working with Mr. Medders and with Sen. Ligon to address Mr. Medders’s and similar employees’ goals for least cost.

SB 126 by new Senate Retirement Committee Chair Ellis Black (R-Valdosta), would allow retired military members to obtain up to 60 months of creditable service toward their retirement benefits. The bill outlines the application and approval process, along with the requirements that must be met to receive such creditable service.

Your GSRA professional legislative liaison Chuck Clay and members of the Legislative Committee have been meeting with legislators to promote your interests. With your help we will be determining the best tactical moments to involve all members in writing and calling campaigns to influence legislators to further our goals. Keep monitoring your e-mails for action alerts.



Kip's View: 2017 GSRA Day at the Capitol and GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception Events a Big Success!

Once again our efforts at the Capitol on February 1st were a big success and built on the past work GSRA and our collaborative partners have done to achieve our goals and objectives. The steps of the Capitol were filled with our members in our picture with the Governor. The Meeting room in the Legislative Office Building was filled to capacity, and our members eagerly received instructions and information to deliver to legislators.

Members praised the Governor for including funds for ERS retirees in the 2018 Budget for ERS retirees; the first budget recommendation of its kind since 2009. Members asked their legislators to support the recommendation of the Governor, and if a little extra funds could be found we would not object to a 1% COLA and/or assistance in seeking a long term solution to help retirees keep up with inflation.

The *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* that night was equally successful, with a great turnout by GSRA and GPHSA members and partners and our guests of honor, legislators and legislative staff members. House Appropriations Chairman Representative Terry England was the recipient of our *2016 Legislative Service Award* for his support in securing a one-time 3% adjustment for ERS retirees based on the first \$30,000 of annual retirement benefits. Had Representative England not insured these

funds were placed in the 2017 budget it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to receive this adjustment. This was the first time retiree benefits have been adjusted since January of 2009. Thank you Rep. England for your help and continued support!

What we must do from now on is:

- Be vigilant and 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 continued support. And, for the members who attended the events, a hearty "Thank You" from your officers, board and fellow members!

Sincerely,
Kip

Enroll in Pension Deduction

If you receive a retirement benefit from the Employees Retirement System, keep your GSRA membership current the convenient way. Consider having your GSRA dues deducted from your benefit. It's easy! Go to www.mygsra.com (select Join Us/Benefits/Pension Deduction Form). Complete the authorization, including your "pension ID number", and mail as indicated on the form. It only reduces your benefit by \$1.66 per month, and you'll never have to worry about renewing your membership again.

Images from GSRA Day



January New Members

Name	County		Name	County		Name	County
Cindy Bennett	Upson		Jan Harvey	(North Carolina)		Harry Phyrdis	Fulton
Joan Chambers	Newton		Linda Head	Upson		June Willis	Ware
Diane Clark	Fayette		Clifford Lane	Tift		Suzanne Robertson	Catoosa
Royce Collins	Upson		Kim Mallett	Gwinnett		George Scarboro	Putnam
Micah Hamrick	Douglas		Betty McCord	Cobb			



A Big Thank You!

GSRA would like to thank the following for making the *2017 GSRA Day at the Capitol* and/or the *GSRA-GPHSA Legislative Reception* events a great success:

Janis Tidwell – GSRA Day Events Committee Chair

Donna Buffum – GSRA Admin

Wayne Drummond – GPHSA Executive Director

Atlanta Postal Credit Union

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

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