



Public Employee Retirees, Inc.™

Perspectives

Serving OPERS Members Since 1948

2nd Quarter 2024

Mission Statement:

To protect and preserve OPERS pension and benefits programs and advocate for changes that are in the best interest of PERI members, while providing value through communications and education of the membership through our districts, local chapters and external partnerships.

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IMPORTANT

Please notify PERI when a member is deceased so that we don't continue mailing to them. Either call us at (800) 247-7374 or email us at laurie@operi.org

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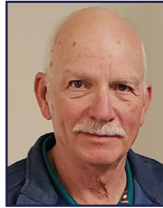
Public Employee Retirees, Inc
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Chairman's Column

by Richard L. Ross



When I first became your chair in September 2021, we needed a legislative agent due to the retirement of John Gilchrist. We were very fortunate to hire Greg Bennett of Byers, Minton, & Associates, who served us extremely well for two years. Greg has now moved to Government Affairs Lead at Owens Corning. We wish him well in his new endeavor. Mara White of Byers Minton has now undertaken our representation, and we look forward to a successful partnership with her assisting in our lobbying efforts.

We continue our efforts to support and defend the defined benefit pension and benefits for which we have all labored and on which we depend. The OPERS Board has approved seeking a four percent increase in the employers' contribution. This would raise the employers' contribution from fourteen percent to eighteen percent. This requires legislative action and would be the first change in the contribution rate since 2008. The PERI board supports this increase to keep OPERS strong and to maintain and possibly increase the money available for the health retirement accounts (HRA). Bills are presently pending in the legislature which would increase the employers' contribution rates for police and fire, as well as state teachers. We will monitor these bills because it is likely that any increase for those retirement systems would happen across all five state retirement systems.

On the national level there are as of April 4, 2024, 311 co-sponsors of HB 82 in the United States House of Representatives and 53 co-sponsors of S.B.597 in the United States Senate. Both bills would repeal the WEP/GPO, which unfairly punishes those of us who had both public and private employment by reducing our Social Security benefits. Both Ohio's senators and ten of the fourteen Ohio house members (there is presently one vacancy) are co-sponsors.

I testified before the Ohio House Pension Committee on May 6, 2023, on behalf of HCR 6, which urges all of the Ohio Congressional delegation to support the repeal. The resolution unanimously passed the House on December 6, 2023. I testified before the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee on February 28, 2024, in support of the resolution and a vote was scheduled in committee on April 10 (this was written on April 5).

To strengthen our organization and its influence, we are pursuing contacts with the alumni associations of the state's university retirees, who are also OPERS recipients, for our mutual benefit.

Since I last wrote, I have visited Morgan and Monroe Counties and am scheduled to speak at an officer's training in Bellville in April, a district meeting for District 4 in May, and a district meeting for District 2 in June. I am looking forward to meeting with more of you to hear your concerns and inform you of what our organization is doing for all of us.

Ohio Legislative and Political Update

by Mara White, Byers, Minton & Associates



We hope this update finds you in good health and spirits. I want to take this opportunity to share some important public policy updates with you as the Ohio legislature gets ready to return from an event primary campaign season.

Post-Primary Political Update

The battle between sitting Speaker Stephens and Senate President Matt Huffman for the speakership in the 136th General Assembly which begins in 2025, has been set. Huffman's team was able to pick off three (3) incumbent members of Team Stephens. There were also several open seats which were won by folks who look to be aligning with Huffman. However, the races where incumbents lost featured incredibly negative ads, and there is frustration among members due to the intraparty "violence".

Bernie Moreno beat out Matt Dolan and Frank LaRose for the Republican nomination for US Senate setting up a match up with Sherrod Brown who has roughly \$13 Million in his campaign account.

Legislative Update—HCR 6 is Getting a Committee Vote!

Both chambers are returning to cap square the week of April 8 and at least now intend to hold both committee and session through this month and the month of May. Their largest task is to allocate both nearly \$2 billion in capital bill appropriations and \$750 Million in Strategic One Time Funding dollars that are mostly relief funds disbursed to states during COVID. Both of these pots of funds are intended for bonded, one-time improvements that would not require ongoing assistance.

HCR-6 *To urge Congress to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset* is set for a Committee Vote in the Senate on Wednesday, April 10th. We expect no problems receiving an affirmative vote and the next step will be to encourage Senate leadership to bring HCR-6 to the floor senate floor for a vote.

State of the State Address

Governor Mike DeWine will give his annual state of the state address this coming Wednesday, April 10th. I will include a synopsis in our next legislative update of the Governor's remarks.

STRS Board Court Proceedings

Governor Mike DeWine Appointed Wade Steen to the STRS board in May of 2023, he then quickly removed him without a publicly given reason, and appointed Brian Perera in his place. Parera is a well-known and generally respected government affairs professional. Steen sued, and this last week the Ohio 10th Court of Appeals heard arguments regarding whether DeWine was within his power when he

removed Steen.

It is generally believed that underpinning this conflict is a disagreeing opinion regarding the investment professionals who are contracted by the board and the quality of their work product. Because of the conflict and opposing views, the campaigns for the elected retiree board seats have become increasingly competitive.

The resolution of this case will likely define the Governor's power as it related to all of the public retiree boards.

Gregg Bennett is no longer with Byers, Minton & Associates and will not be our Legislative Counsel. We are sad to see him go but happy that he has found a job as Chief Government relations officer with Owens Corning. Mara White will be taking his place as PERI's Legislative Counsel.

Mara joined Byers, Minton, & Associates in 2021 and serves as Director of Government Affairs advocating on a broad variety policy and regulatory issues on behalf of clients. Prior to joining the firm, Mara was a member of the campaign finance team to former Congressman Pat Tiberi. She then joined the campaign of Pat's successor and current Congressman, Troy Balderson during the 2018 special election in Ohio's Twelfth District. Mara eventually went on to serve as a Legislative Aide in the Ohio House where she worked on legislation in the transportation, public safety, and energy sectors as well as gained valuable experience working on Ohio's biennial operating budget.

Mara completed her undergraduate degree in Political Science and Philosophy at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. In addition to politics, Mara is passionate about mental healthcare and is currently working on her master's in clinical counseling at Capital University in Columbus.

Important Note for Our Members

Public Employee Retirees, INC (PERI) is not POP5 (Protect Ohio Pensions), nor do we have any affiliation with the organization. We keep a full-time lobbyist at the statehouse, Mara White of Byers, Minton & Associates. We are the only association that is focused exclusively on OPERS' pension and benefits and always advocate on behalf of the retiree.

All of PERI's communications will have the State of Ohio flag as the E in our logo. Receiving this newsletter confirms that you have an active membership with us. If you are an annual or associate member, you will be notified of membership renewals in mid-November. Please call our office at 1-800-247-7374 if you need any assistance.

A Message from Your Executive Director

by Lezlie Garcia



Important Notice

Happy Spring, I hope everyone is doing well.

The dues renewal mailing in November of 2023 had many errors, starting with the wrong date on your voucher. A third-party company used our old documents, causing significant confusion for our members. We apologize for this confusion and have terminated that individual from further work orders. The individual then sent out our corrected correspondence with the correct 2024 date, which caused even more chaos and duplicate payments for some members. Those duplicate payments have been changed to reflect the following year's expiration date (2025).

Then again, in February, we sent out a reminder notice to members that had not paid. Unfortunately, the generated list had an expiration date of December 31, 2023. This caused many members to receive a notice they never should have received because you already paid us. This error caused many of you to send duplicate and triple payments. Any payments we have received from the February mailing will not be processed. Due to cost and security, we have chosen not to return the checks in the mail and will destroy the checks securely. It's important that you update your check registers accordingly to void that check out and add it back into your balance. This will help you maintain accurate financial records.

New membership cards started to go out in January of 2024 and will continue to arrive through May of 2024. If you have not received a 2024 membership card, please contact our office to be placed on a list. We don't print your membership cards in-house, so we collect a full list to order them in batches. This helps keep costs down.

Many errors were discovered, and we are making all necessary changes to avoid them in the future. We appreciate everyone's patience and understanding during this time. Thank you for being a valued member and continuing your membership with us.



IMPORTANT NUMBERS FOR YOU TO HAVE ON HAND

- (800) 222-7377 OPERS
- (844) 287-9945 Medicare VIA Benefits*
- (833) 939-1215 Non-Medicare VIA Benefits*
- (888) 262-4874 Metlife Dental & Vision
- (800) 633-4227 Medicare
- (877) 556-4582 AMBA
- (800) 772-1213 Social Security
- (877) 644-6457 Deferred Comp
- (800) 686-1578 OSHIIP

*If you need information concerning your HRA account or insurance, call VIA Benefits. If you have questions concerning your pension, please call OPERS.

District News

PERI Announces Search for District 8 Representative

We are seeking a candidate to fill the position of District 8 Representative. Counties within this district can be found on page 8. To be a District Representative, one needs to live in the district and be willing to travel throughout the district and to Columbus for monthly board meetings. If you are interested and want more details, please call us at (800) 247-7374 or send us an email at laurie@operi.org.

New District 10 Representative



Chair Richard Ross (R) swearing in of new District 10 Representative, Mark Faust (L). Mr. Faust served in the Air Force for 21 years, retiring as a Senior Master Sergeant. In 1988, he joined the staff at the

Ohio Veteran's Home in Sandusky, Ohio, where he worked for 20 years until he retired. In 2011-2014, he was offered a job as an outreach specialist for the Ohio Veteran's Home, and in 2015, he was contracted as the part-time Veteran Benefits Resource Manager at Stein Hospice. He retired from that position in 2022. Upon retirement, Mr. Faust joined the PERI Erie County chapter and served as the chapter Vice President.



The cost of your Medicare Part D-covered drugs may change throughout the year. If you notice that your drug prices have changed, it may be because you are in a different phase of Part D coverage. There are four different phases—or periods—of Part D coverage: the deductible period, the initial coverage period, the coverage gap, and catastrophic coverage. As you spend money on your covered drugs, you progress through the coverage periods until the new calendar year starts. Your Part D plan should track your coverage period for you, and this information should appear in your monthly statements.

Until you meet your Part D deductible, you are in the **deductible period**. During this time, you will pay the full negotiated price for your covered prescription drugs. While deductibles can vary from plan to plan, no plan’s deductible can be higher than \$545 in 2024. Some plans have no deductible, and some plans don’t apply a deductible for certain drugs—usually generics – at certain pharmacies.

After you meet your deductible, your plan will help pay for your covered prescription drugs. This is your **initial coverage period**. Your plan will pay some of the cost, and you will pay a copayment or coinsurance.

You enter the **coverage gap** when your total drug costs—including what you and your plan have paid for your drugs—reaches a certain limit. In 2024, that limit is \$5,030. While in the coverage gap, you are responsible for 25% of the cost of your drugs. The coverage gap is also sometimes called the donut hole.

In all Part D plans in 2024, you enter **catastrophic coverage** after you reach \$8,000 in out-of-pocket costs for covered drugs. This amount is made up of costs you pay and some costs that others pay. As of 2024, during this period, you owe no copays or coinsurance for your covered drugs for the remainder of the year. Not all costs count towards reaching this cap, though. Costs that do not help you reach catastrophic coverage include monthly premiums, what your plan pays toward drug costs, the cost of non-covered drugs, and the cost of covered drugs from pharmacies outside your plan’s network.

Beginning in 2025, the structure of Medicare Part D will change. There will be only three coverage phases– the deductible, the initial coverage period, and a zero-cost phase after an out-of-pocket cap is reached. Additionally, your out-of-pocket costs for covered drugs will be limited to \$2,000 in deductibles, copays, and coinsurance. Also starting in 2025, you have the choice to spread out-of-pocket Part D costs over the year. This won’t reduce the total amount owed over the year, but it can allow you to spread costs over 12 months. For example, you could pay your deductible over the course of the year, rather than all at once at the beginning of the year. Whether this type of payment plan will be beneficial will depend on your circumstances and preferences. Remember that these changes are not in effect until 2025.

If you have questions about your Part D plan or how to read your monthly statement, the Ohio Department of Insurance Medicare Division - OSHIIP is here to help. Call OSHIIP at 1-800-686-1578 Monday-Friday, 7:30a-5pm.

PERI 2024 Webinars

Learn more and register for upcoming webinars by scanning the corresponding QR code.

PREPARING FOR SUMMER DISCOUNTS

**May 21, 2024
4:00 p.m. EST**



SCAN HERE

ALL ABOUT YOUR DENTAL AND VISION PLANS

**June 24, 2024
4:00 p.m. EST**



SCAN HERE

ALL ABOUT LONG TERM CARE

**July 16, 2024
4:00 p.m. EST**



SCAN HERE

Chapter News

DISTRICT 02 SHELBY COUNTY



Shelby County chapter President, Jack Toomey. Shari Eilerman, read the December meeting minutes.



Roger Wehrman, Member Liaison, providing members with an overview of our upcoming April speaker regarding Land Banks - their purpose and responsibilities.



February speaker, Tyler Barhorst, from the YMCA spoke on programs available for seniors and chapter attendees.



Merrill Asher, PERI Vice Chair, addressed the chapter.

DISTRICT 05 RICHLAND COUNTY



Richland chapter members received a great amount of information from Jennifer Miller, Area Agency Alzheimer's Program Manager, at the March 19th meeting.

DISTRICT 05 KNOX COUNTY



Speaker from the Board of Elections

DISTRICT 03 LOGAN COUNTY



Doug Smith, District 3 Representative, swearing in Logan County chapter officers.

DISTRICT 06 FRANKLIN COUNTY



Franklin County chapter meeting

Chapter News

DISTRICT 08 MONROE COUNTY



PERI Chair, Richard Ross, swearing in the Monroe County chapter officers.

DISTRICT 11 MAHONING COUNTY



Walter Duzzny, Mahoning County chapter President and Lisa Dalga from ProSeniors.

DISTRICT 08 HOCKING COUNTY



Lezlie Garcia, PERI Executive Director, and Suellen Wilder. Ms. Garcia shared with the Hocking County chapter members recent updates from the Westerville office.



Hocking County chapter Vice Chair, Shirley Andy, being sworn in.



Walter Duzzny, Mahoning County chapter President with Reggi Witsaman, District 11 Representative.

DISTRICT 09 JEFFERSON COUNTY



Jefferson County Chapter #5 meeting on February 14th at Froehlich's Classic Corner Restaurant in Steubenville. Chapter officers and members are included along with District Representative, Jim Range.



Reggi Witsaman swearing in the Mahoning County chapter officers.

IMPORTANT

If you have a seasonal address, please call or email us when you move. Our mail is sent out bulk rate, therefore the post office does not forward it.

Chapter News

2024 District Annual Meetings

DISTRICT 05 & 10 OFFICER TRAINING



Members left to right, Kay Weisenauer, Sue Derr, Cathy Bowen, Ruthie Reier and Karen Scott. Officers from Wyandot County and Karen Scott on the far right from Crawford County.



Speakers were Scott Judd from AMBA



Erie County chapter Secretary/Treasurer, Ned Faust, winner of the 50/50 pictured with Connie Dailey.



Chapter officers from Districts 5 & 10



Chapter officer training hosted by former District 10 & 5 Representatives, Rick Lawrence and Connie Dailey.

District 2

Contact to Register: Sharon Drerup at 419-969-0392
Date: June 20th
Location: Fraternal Order of Eagles in Ottawa

District 3

Contact to Register: Doug Smith at 937-360-5381
Date: May 21th
Location: Kohler Presidential Banquet Center in Dayton (Hawaiian Theme)

District 4

Contact to Register: Rosemary Dahmann at 513-922-3459
Date: May 9th
Location: Ponderosa Steakhouse in Hillsboro

District 5

Contact to Register: Brenda Harden at 419-969-0392
Date: June 6th
Location: Mt Gilead High School
338 Park Ave, Mt Gilead

District 6

Contact to Register: Bonnie Mitchell at 614-443-8314
Date: June 17th
Location: OCSEA Union Hall
390 Worthington Rd, Westerville, OH

District 7

Contact to Register: Greg Ervin at 740-286-8218
Date: June 21st
Location: First Presbyterian Church of Jackson
225 Church Street, Jackson, Ohio 45640

District 8

Contact to Register: Richard Ross at 740-962-5737
Date: June 18th
Location: Heck Center, Stockport, OH

District 10

Contact to Register: Rick Lawrence at 440-225-2957
Date: June 20th

District 11

Contact to Register: Reggie Witsaman at 330-687-6293
Date: June 12th
Location: The Elks Club
776 North Freedom St, Ravenna



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2nd Quarter 2024 Newsletter!

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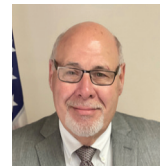
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Office
Assistant

<u>District 1 Counties:</u> Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Sandusky, Williams, Wood	<u>District 7 Counties:</u> Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton
<u>District 2 Counties:</u> Allen, Auglaize, Hardin, Mercer, Paulding, Putnam, Shelby, Van Wert	<u>District 8 Counties:</u> Athens, Hocking, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Washington
<u>District 3 Counties:</u> Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene, Logan, Miami, Montgomery, Preble	<u>District 9 Counties:</u> Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Tuscarawas
<u>District 4 Counties:</u> Adams, Brown, Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton, Highland, Warren	<u>District 10 Counties:</u> Ashland, Cuyahoga, Erie, Huron, Lorain, Medina, Summit, Wayne
<u>District 5 Counties:</u> Crawford, Hancock, Knox, Marion, Morrow, Richland, Seneca, Wyandot	<u>District 11 Counties:</u> Ashtabula, Columbiana, Geauga, Lake, Mahoning, Portage, Stark, Trumbull
<u>District 6 Counties:</u> Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, Union	