



Public Employee Retirees, Inc.™

Perspectives

Serving OPERS Members Since 1948

1st Quarter 2025

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



2024 has come to a close, as has the 118th Congress of the United States and the 135th General Assembly of the Ohio Legislature. We have achieved several legislative goals this past year due to your support and encouragement. Most notable is the repeal of the WEP/GPO penalties, with eleven of the fifteen US representatives being co-sponsors, finally leading to a 327-75 favorable vote in the US House. On the Senate side, Ohio Senator Brown was one of the two main sponsors of the Senate repeal, and Senator Vance was also a co-sponsor, leading to the repeal passing the Senate with a vote of 76-20. Thank you for the phone calls and emails thanking PERI for our effort to pass this much-needed legislation, particularly upon the Ohio delegation.

In the Ohio legislature, it was my privilege to represent PERI to testify before the House Pension Committee and the Senate Governance Committee on behalf of House Joint Resolution 6. HR 6 was sponsored by Representatives Angela King and Phil Plummer, which urged Congress to repeal the WEP/GPO provisions of the Social Security law. The resolution passed both Houses of the legislature unanimously. This resolution was undoubtedly helpful in getting the large support we received from the Ohio Congressional delegation on this matter.

Another success was the passage of Senate Bill 6, sponsored by the late Senator Kirk Schuring. This bill codified the fiduciary responsibilities of investing public funds for the best benefit of the funds. Again, Lezlie and I were privileged to submit written support of this measure, which passed both chambers by a wide margin and was signed into law by Governor DeWine.

During more than three years as your chair, the membership has had no bigger concern than repealing the WEP/GPO provisions. Our success on this issue shows the strength and the need for PERI. Please point out to your former co-workers that this would not have happened if we did not exist. The more members we have, the greater our influence will be.

I look forward to the remaining months of my time as your leader to hearing and voicing your concerns to our legislators and to OPERS. We are members of the best retirement system in the state and one

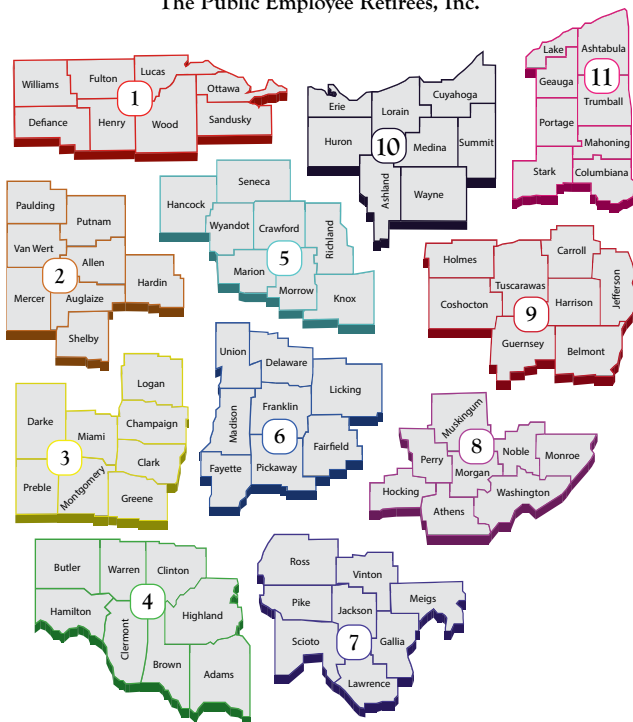
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of the best in the country. I am scheduled to be at local meetings in Licking and Morgan Counties this winter and will likely be at several district meetings later in the year. As recently as last summer, National Review had an article urging the dissolution of all defined benefit pension plans. We stand opposed to all such actions. We are the only organization in Ohio set to protect our defined benefit pension and other benefits we earned as public servants. Continue with us to be vigilant protectors of our OPERS' pensions and benefits.

District News

PERI Continues Search for District 8 Representative

District Regions of
The Public Employee Retirees, Inc.



We are seeking candidates 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 bi-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.

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 begin the 136th General Assembly.

Legislative Update

The 136th General Assembly has officially been sworn in! Matt Huffman and his designated leadership team were all approved on the House floor on Monday, January 6th, without any drama. A shift away from the last three floor votes for Speaker. Rob McColley was formally elected as Senate President. He will serve 2 years in the role as he is term-limited.



Upcoming Schedule

Over the next two weeks, both chambers will name their committee assignments and Chairmanships, including the Pension Committee. The House plans to be in a brief session the Week of January 20th to vote on the House Rules and Procedures. The Senate will also pass a resolution setting its rules and procedures this month, with the exact date to be determined. We expect the Governor's introduced version of the budget to be introduced by the end of January or early February.



WEP/GPO Repeal

Referred to as the Social Security Fairness Act by the U.S. Congress, President Biden signed HR82 on Sunday, January 5th. An analysis performed by the Congressional Office of Budget Management shows that the average pensioner will see a \$360 monthly increase in benefits.

All Ohio Congressmen voted yes on the floor. In the Senate, Sherrod Brown (an ardent supporter who was present for the president's bill signing) voted yes. JD Vance was not present for the vote, which is standard practice when a U.S. Senator is slated to head to the White House.

This Quarter in Retirement System News

Relative to the first three quarters of 2024, Q4 was quieter for all pension systems, including STRS. PERI's priority was to ensure that any reforms to the STRS system did not de facto become a consideration for OPERS, as the systems are different. As you may remember, Director Carraher reiterated our concern and position during her remarks at the PERI annual meeting. OPERS continues to maintain its independence from the other public systems, which is of huge importance to PERI.

Several pension system reform bills were introduced in the 135th General Assembly, including HB296, which would have increased employer contributions to the OP&F fund. While none of those bills were successful this General Assembly, they did receive several hearings and a few votes. We expect those bills to be reintroduced early this year.

A Message from Your Executive Director

by Lezlie Garcia



As we embark on our journey in 2025, PERI is thrilled to announce the passage of The Social Security Fairness Act. This significant milestone, signed by President Biden on January 6, 2025, is a wonderful holiday gift and New Year blessing for all impacted retirees and surviving spouses. I want to thank everyone who called and wrote letters to our legislators to encourage the passing of this bill!

The Social Security Administration stated, **"At this time, the SS Administration is evaluating the law and how to implement it. We will provide more information on our website, www.ssa.org, as soon as it is available. If you are already receiving benefits, you do not need to take any action except to verify that we have your current address and direct deposit information."** Please be patient and know that the bill states that recipients will receive retroactive payments for any increase in benefits back to January 2024.

PERI's 2025 dues were mailed out in mid-November, and we have received over half of our expected dues, which include chapter membership. If you haven't mailed in your renewal of membership, please do so as soon as possible. Starting this year, every ANNUAL PERI member inside and outside Ohio will automatically be a chapter member. For members who live within a county that does not have an open chapter, cannot attend in person, or are living outside of Ohio, we are excited to announce the launch of a virtual chapter this quarter. This is a convenient and inclusive option for all, designed to ensure that every member can participate and feel included. We urge anyone interested in participating in the virtual chapter to please call (1-800-247-7374) or email PERI (members@peri.org) to update or add an email address to your account. If you hold a Life or Associate Membership, we did not collect chapter dues from you, and you will be responsible for paying your chapter dues directly.

If you are a member near Tampa, Florida, we have great news for you. Walter Duzzney, former Mahoning Chapter President and now a Floridian, will be working on opening a Tampa area chapter within the next three to four months. The PERI office will provide him with the most up-to-date member list, so please make sure your information is correct. If you have an email address, this

56TH ELECTORAL COLLEGE OF OHIO



Supreme Court Justice Sharon Kennedy swearing in the 17 electoral delegates prior to their official vote for the 47th president of the United States in the Senate chambers of the Ohio State House.



Brenda Harden, District 5 Representative and Lt governor Jon Husted



Brenda Harden, Lt governor Jon Husted and State central committee person Susan Platt



Dave Burke (previous State Senator) Jane Timken, Frank LaRose and Brenda Harden

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will undoubtedly make communication easier for him.

In my past articles of 2024, I always informed you of cost increases and budget cuts for the best interest of our members and organization. I am pleased to tell you that PERI did not renew our lease on the second unit we used for a boardroom, saving us over \$18,000. This decision reflects our commitment to prudent financial management and our efforts to reduce costs without compromising on the quality of our organization. Our Board of Trustees currently meets monthly, and we have utilized the local libraries and hotel meeting rooms at little to no cost. We still have a lot of work to do to focus on our membership growth and reduce costs anywhere we can. The board will make a three-year strategic plan sometime in June/July, in preparation for PERI's executive board election, in the third quarter newsletter.

Save the date for our 51st Annual Meeting for Monday, September 29, 2025, at Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center, located on State Route 23 in Delaware County, Ohio. This new location will provide ample parking, beautiful grounds, and a restaurant and bar on the premises. The hotel is very close and convenient to shopping and restaurants, making it a perfect spot for our meeting. Keep an eye out for additional details to follow later in the year.

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.



**Department of
Insurance**

Senior Health Insurance Information Program

Medicare Enrollment Opportunities Getting Underway

Medicare's annual open enrollment period concluded on Dec. 7, 2024, but other enrollment opportunities for Medicare coverage are underway.

Ohioans on Medicare who did not sign up for Part A (hospital insurance) and/or Part B (medical insurance) during their initial enrollment period, and do not qualify for a special enrollment period, can sign up for Medicare during the Jan. 1 to March 31 general enrollment period. Coverage begins on the first day of the month after signing up. Sign up through www.SSA.gov.

The Medicare Advantage open enrollment period also runs from Jan. 1 to March 31. During this time, individuals in a Medicare Advantage plan can switch to another Medicare Advantage plan or return to Original Medicare. For Ohioans impacted by network disruptions with Medicare Advantage plans, this enrollment period is another opportunity for Medicare Advantage plan enrollees to review their provider networks and determine if their current plan is adequate or if another plan (or Original Medicare) would be a better alternative. Any changes made during this period will take effect on the first day of the month after the new plan receives the request.

Additionally, starting Jan. 1, two new special enrollment periods are available. One is for individuals who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, and the other is for those who qualify for Extra Help, a low-income subsidy for prescription drug costs.

Get more information at <https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/sign-up/when-does-medicare-coverage-start>

Staff from the Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program at the Ohio Department of Insurance are available at 800-686-1578 and oshiipmail@insurance.ohio.gov to answer any questions.

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amba-review.com/PERI

SCAN HERE to
find out more about
your Passport and
PERI Benefits



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, Greg Bennett 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.

Chapter News

DISTRICT 02 SHELBY COUNTY



Shelby County Chapter meeting



Merrill Asher PERI Vice-Chair presented Jack Toomey, a certificate of appreciation as outgoing President for 4 years.



Merrill Asher presented a certificate of recognition to Carole Leffler for her many years of service as chapter treasurer and president.

SAVE THE DATE

PERI's 51st Annual Meeting

09.29.25



Chapter News

DISTRICT 05 RICHLAND COUNTY



PERI Board 3rd Vice Chair Connie Dailey (R) was invited to represent PERI at the 50th Annual meeting of the Area Agency on Aging Ohio. Marcia Rice, PERI Richland chapter president (L), has been a long-standing member of Area Agency on Aging groups.

DISTRICT 06 UNION COUNTY



Over 50 members and guests enjoyed the Union County chapter annual Christmas luncheon.

DISTRICT 05 KNOX COUNTY



Knox County Chapter meeting



PERI Treasurer, John DiPietro, presents a prize to Janet Burkes

DISTRICT 06 FAIRFIELD COUNTY



Executive Director, Lezlie Garcia, swearing in Fairfield County chapter officers



Fairfield County Chapter meeting

DISTRICT 08 MONROE COUNTY



Monroe County Chapter Officers (L to R) President Carl Davis, Treasurer Darlena Fogle, Secretary Sharon Scott, VP Shirley Saffell, sworn in by Kitty Kahrig. Betty Ward legislative officer not shown.





TO: All Preble County OPERS Retirees

YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR

Preble County Chapter Re-Opening

Together We Can!

PLEASE JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT PASSAGE AND THE OPENING OF CHAPTER # 19

FEB 27, 2025	10:00AM
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**EATON BRANCH LIBRARY
301 N BARRON ST EATON, OH 45320**

Chapter News

NEW DISTRICT 6 REPRESENTATIVE PATTY PIKULA



Patty Pikula worked for the Ohio Department of Transportation for 30 years, specializing in the Transportation Grant Program. She made presentations and assisted agencies in writing grants for the program. Prior to this position, Patty managed payments of public transit grants to 52 public transit systems in Ohio, both urban and rural transit systems.

Since leaving ODOT, Ms. Pikula transcribed and recorded Social Security Disability Hearings, worked for H&R Block as a Tax Preparer and Receptionists and scored proficiency tests.

DISTRICT 11 MAHONING COUNTY



*Christmas
Party*



*Mahoning County
Chapter President
Marilyn Abramski
with guest Major
Sherrylynn Moore.*

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.
If you would like to receive email communication
from us, please send us your email address to
members@operi.org

2025 District Annual Meetings

District 1

Contact to Register: Christopher Thompson at 419-729-3653
Date/Time: April 28th at 10 AM
Location: Maumee Fraternal Order of Eagles #2562
2301 Detroit Ave.
Cost: \$17.50

District 2

Contact to Register: Sharon Drerup at 419-969-0392
Date/Time: June 9th at 10:30 AM
Location: Fraternal Order of Eagles in Ottawa
Speakers: Roy Klopfenstein, Merrill Asher,
Tim Steitz

District 7

Contact to Register: Greg Ervin at 740 710-2241
Date/Time: June 20th, Registration 9:15 AM
Meeting Start 10:00 AM
Location: First Presbyterian Church of Jackson
225 Church Street, Jackson, Ohio 45640
Speakers: Tim Steitz, OPERS Retiree Rep.,
Lezlie Garcia, PERI Executive Director

District 9

Contact to Register: Jim Range at 330-827-7591
Date: May 15th, Registration 9:15 AM
Meeting Start 10:30 AM
Location: John M. Abdalla Municipal Building
136 2nd Ave. Stratton, Ohio
Speakers: Richard Ross, State Rep. Jodi Salvo
Cost: \$15.00

District 11

Contact to Register: Reggi Witsaman at 330-687-6293
Date: June 10th

1st Quarter 2025 Newsletter!

PERI Board of Trustees



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Chair
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richross@embarqmail.com



Merrill Asher
Vice-Chair
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Connie Dailey
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Vacant
3rd Vice Chair



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Vacant
District 4



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Vacant
District 8



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Mark Faust
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Reggi Witsaman
District 11
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rwitsama@kent.edu

PERI Staff & Advisors



Lezlie Garcia
Executive Director



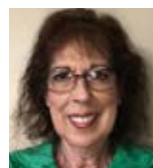
Mara White
Legislative Counsel



Laurie Frithiof
Administrative
Assistant



Diana Daniels
Accounting
Assistant



Kris Evans
Office
Assistant

DISTRICT 1 COUNTIES
Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas,
Ottawa, Sandusky, Williams, Wood

DISTRICT 2 COUNTIES
Allen, Auglaize, Hardin, Mercer,
Paulding, Putnam, Shelby, Van Wert

DISTRICT 3 COUNTIES
Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene,
Logan, Miami, Montgomery, Preble

DISTRICT 4 COUNTIES
Adams, Brown, Butler, Clermont,
Clinton, Hamilton, Highland, Warren

DISTRICT 5 COUNTIES
Crawford, Hancock, Knox, Marion,
Marrow, Richland, Seneca, Wyandot

DISTRICT 6 COUNTIES
Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin,
Licking, Madison, Pickaway, Union

DISTRICT 7 COUNTIES
Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs,
Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton

DISTRICT 8 COUNTIES
Athens, Hocking, Monroe, Morgan,
Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Washington

DISTRICT 9 COUNTIES
Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Guernsey,
Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Tuscarawas

DISTRICT 10 COUNTIES
Ashland, Cuyahoga, Erie, Huron,
Lorain, Medina, Summit, Wayne

DISTRICT 11 COUNTIES
Ashtabula, Columbiana, Geauga, Lake,
Mahoning, Portage, Stark, Trumbull