



**Skagit - Island - San Juan
Washington State School Retirees' Association
Unit 21**



Hello Members!

I would like to share with you the benefits of your being a member of our local Skagit/Island/San Juan School Retirees' Association and WSSRA.

Locally:

1. We hold general membership social and informational meetings. See article about upcoming Feb. 26 meeting.
2. This year we distributed \$4,800 in mini-grants to current members who are still working in local schools. These fund, \$200 each for current members, \$100 each for non-members, and are being used to purchase additional supplies, fund field trips and to help deal with student behavior/learning issues in their classrooms among other things.
3. We award two scholarships yearly. One to a local high school student during their student teaching year at WWU and one to a student at SVC, working towards a trade certificate.
4. We donate to the local Boy's and Girl's Clubs who provide activities and help after school to promote academic success. Youth that participate in this program outperform others by being on track to graduate high school, having regular school attendance, and even how far kids think they will get in school. (Sept. 14, 2003 skagitclubs.org).

5. We present workshops in local schools to aide all school employees throughout their career regarding retirement planning.

On the State level:

1. We have several members that work with our local legislators to help maintain/improve school retiree benefits.
2. State wide his past year, we awarded over \$117,000 in scholarships to high school seniors.
3. We are associated with AARP and work with them on senior issues, especially at the national level, i.e.: prescription drug pricing.

One of the major benefits over these recent COVID years has been ZOOM to help keep your board connected to each other and supporting our causes. If you are interested in learning more about what we do or have an organization in mind that we should consider helping, please contact one of your officers. We will be at our Feb. 26 meeting. And if you know of a former/current colleague that is not a member, please let them know what we doing to support them through our organization.

Bruce Boyer, Treasurer

Board Members / Contacts

Co President
Barb Robinson
babsann09@comcast.net

Co President/ Secretary
Diane Visten
dvisten@yahoo.com

Treasurer
Bruce Boyer
bnpboyer@hotmail.com

Correspondence and
Historian
Lonnie Keown
lonnie.keown@gmail.com

Financial
Bill DeHon
bjdehon@comcast.net

Board Member /
Membership
Kathy Caldwell
kmcald70@gmail.com

Board Member at Large
Joanne Jones
jicicchettijones@outlook.com

Secretary
Diane Visten
dvisten@yahoo.com

Newsletter
Boni Killion
bonikillion@gmail.com

Contact any of the above
individuals for information
about joining the board.

We Welcome New Faces!

Washington State School Retirees Report for 2024 Legislative Session

In a short session things move quickly and change in a hurry, for better or worse.

Two of our bills, **House Bill 1985** (The Plan 1 one-time 3% COLA) and **House Bill 2013** (The Department of Retirement Systems' "Month of Death Bill") had already gotten public hearings and were scheduled for executive action on Thursday, January 25th.

However, at some point before these bills received executive consideration, the word came down to "trim the budget". Here's where our bills are today:

House Bill 1985: The Plan 1 Cost of Living Adjustment was amended. The one-time 3% Plan 1 COLA was cut from up to \$125 per month to \$110 per month, making it identical to the COLAs awarded in 2021 and 2023. This won't affect many of us, just some at the higher end of the retirement scale. This could have been much worse!

The amended **SHB (Substitute House Bill) 1985** received a unanimous vote out of the **House Appropriations Committee**. Now the bill has passed the House of Representatives and is on to the Senate Ways and Means Committee for action on or after February 14th.

House Bill 2013: The Month of Death Bill would have allowed a retiree's pension and his/her PEBB medical premium to be paid for the full month of his or her death. It would end the requirement that the **Department of Retirement Systems** contact surviving families to require reimbursement for the unused portion of the dead retiree's last pension check.

Instead of receiving executive action last Thursday, **House Bill 2013** was killed and the committee substituted a brand new bill, **House Bill 2481**. This new bill does not even mention the final month's pension payment; it only agrees to pay the retiree's final month's PEBB medical benefit. The month of death phone calls will continue, and survivors will still be told to return the unused pension. HB 2481 is now in the House Rules Committee.

House Bill 2471, sponsored by our friend, **Representative Shelley Kloba**, would have provided .5 additional retirement service credit for Plan 2 and 3 employees

who serve beyond their 30th year. Admittedly, it "dropped" on January 23rd, late in the session, and it has not received a public hearing. We will try to bring it back next session.

House Bill 2188 would have increased the **Medicare Eligible Healthcare Benefit PEBB Subsidy** from 50% of plan cost to 60% of the cost but not more than \$183 per month. It had a public hearing in the **House Appropriations Committee** January 15, but was never scheduled for executive action, so it did not survive the February 5th cutoff deadline. Its companion bill **Senate Bill 6139**, did not even receive a public hearing.

As a reminder of our overall goals for 2024, I again list the WSSRA legislative priorities below:

- Obtain a Plan 1 Cost of Living Adjustment.
- Protect Retiree Medical Benefits.
- Make the actuarially recommended pension payment to the pension funds.
- Support additional payments to the Plan 1 Unfunded Liability.
- Provide Retirees Full Month's Salary/PEBB Benefit through month of death
- Support Plan 2/3 Members by lowering the retirement age and increasing pension benefits.
- We work to achieve these goals by supporting the passage of bills that address them. The members of the WSSRA Legislative Committee meet with as many legislators as they can. Our NW-1 Legislative Committee Members have already met virtually with 18 of them.. Our February appointments will all be in person in Olympia.

Skagit, Island, San Juan School Retirees' Association Presents: Critical Emergency Services Available in your Community

What can happen if you or your friends experience a tragic event?

Speakers Haley Thompson, Skagit County Coronor and Bill DeHon,

Volunteer Support Officer will offer important information on the services available to you and others in your community.

Monday, February 26, 2024 11:00 a.m.

Royal Star Restaurant 2300 Freeway Drive, Mount Vernon 98273

Lunch is available for \$10.00 with ticket from Retirees.

Protect yourself against tech based fraud and AI

In the second of a series of 2023-24 member-only webinar presentations, WSSRA, with the assistance of AARP-Washington, will host a 50-60 minute Zoom presentation on new developments in fraud protection and artificial intelligence (AI) on *Thursday, February 15 at 9:00 am.*

To be sure, tech-based fraud has been with us for a long time. But the advent of AI has changed the fraud landscape significantly. This webinar will explore the fascinating intersection of AI and fraud prevention. Kay Tomlinson will be our host. Kay has been a Fraud Watch Speakers Bureau volunteer with AARP.

(Note: we will record the webinar and post it on the WSSRA website for those working or busy at the 9 am time slot.)

**To view this webinar
you must register!**

**Go to WSSRA.org
Click on the Webinar link.
You will see the Artificial
Intelligence and Fraud
Webinar listed.
Click on that link to register
for the February 15th event.**

Thinking about retirement? WSSRA Pre-Retirement Zoom Webinars

Thursday, March 14, 2024 @ 4:30 p.m.

Department of Retirement Systems and Health Care Authority/PEBB

Tuesday, March 19, 2024 @ 4:30 p.m.

Social Security/Medicare and VEBA

Please visit www.wssra.org and register under the webinars tab.