



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

February 2025

Unit 28 of the Washington State School Retirees' Association
Serving retired and active school employees and our community.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

February 2025 will be a busy month. The calendar is peppered with national days, weeks, or months such as Valentine's Day, Groundhog's Day, President's Day, Super Bowl Sunday, Black History Month, and National Cancer Prevention Month.

But Plan 1 retirees will be closely following the movement of bills through both chambers of the legislature this 69th Biennial Session. The 2025 session is called the "long" session, convening on January 13, 2025, ending on April 27, 2025. During this session the legislature will adopt the 2025-2027 Operating, Capital, and Transportation Budgets. The state revenue forecast report from November 2024 reported that the budget will be at least \$10 billion short over the next four years.

Several options are being considered to help bridge this gap, and one involves freezing public employees' wages for the next two years even though they were bargained as part of the state's collective bargaining agreement. Consequently, TRS/PERS Plan 1 retirees are concerned that if wages are frozen, there is a big chance that our Plan 1 cost of living request will not be approved. It is crucial to share our stories with our legislators and to explain that since Plan 1 members have not received increases on a yearly basis for years. Most find that the purchasing value of their 2025 pension is below the value of the pension that they received when they retired. Many of us are struggling to pay bills. We must communicate that we are in a special situation in that all pension plans are not treated equally. Every pension plan, except TRS1 and PERS1, has automatic COLA increases. We want the all Plans 2 and 3 to be maintained, and we want Plan 1s to get an automatic yearly COLA up to 3%.

Our legislators want to hear from us, and we can't be silent!

Patty Gee, TCSRA President

WELCOME THURSTON COUNTY SHERIFF DEREK SANDERS

TCSRA is honored to welcome Sheriff Derek Sanders as our luncheon guest this month. Sheriff Sanders is a dedicated servant of Thurston County, demonstrating exceptional commitment and leadership. He served as a deputy for six years before becoming Thurston County's 24th sheriff,



Sheriff Sanders has made significant strides in his role as sheriff. His relentless effort to solve crimes, while respecting the rights of both victims and suspects, has earned him commendations from all parties involved.

Known regionally as a "crime magnet," Sheriff Sanders is committed to being at the forefront of active police work. His experiences have fueled his passion for advocating for state and county improvements in critical areas such as domestic violence, homelessness, and poverty. This dedication to bettering the community is reflected in his high expectations and proactive approach to tackling these issues.

We look forward to learning about Sheriff Sanders' goals and initiatives for Thurston County.

[Bring a friend, and be sure to make reservations for your entire party. See page 2 for reservation info.]

Pat Slosson, Hospitality Committee

Friday, February 21, 2025—12 noon

Indian Summer Golf and Country Club

Menu: Cobb salad with chicken
OR Cobb salad with plant-based chicken (V)
Dessert: Chef's Choice

LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS



I will be sending out emails to remind you of our upcoming luncheon. Please respond to that email if you plan to attend. We need our reservation count by **noon on Friday, February 14.**

If you **do not receive an email**, or if you **need to cancel or add to your** reservation, email me at **dazicar88@gmail.com**, or call me at **253-381-2592 no later than noon on Friday, February 14.** Please do not call the restaurant with reservation changes.

To be added to the email list for notification, please send me your email address.

ZiNita Carrell, Email Committee Chair

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



The 2025 Legislative Session is off with a bang. Legislators are being forced to address a budget shortfall of somewhere between \$12 and \$16 billion dollars over the next four years. Budget cuts and new taxes are both being seriously considered as ways to help close the gap.

The shortfall is bad news for retired school employees, who rely on pensions and health insurance benefits funded by the state. In past budget shortfalls, we've seen legislators make cuts to pensions and benefits to balance the budget. For example, in 2011 the legislature eliminated the annual COLA relied upon by TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees and substantially reduced the benefit provided to keep PEBB health insurance premiums affordable. We are vigilantly watching to make sure this does not happen again. We are also looking for creative ways to advance our priorities in a challenging budget environment.

(Continued on page 4; see "Legislative Report")

Each month we will randomly draw the name of one of our "active" (not-yet-retired) members, who will receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.



This month's winner is:



McKenzie Devore
Yelm Community Schools

Check this box each month to see if YOU are the lucky member.

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Mary Douglas**. We offer sincere condolences to her family and friends.

PLEATS, PLAIN, OR PLAID — SCHOOL UNIFORMS



It seems like several careers ago, as an April Fool prank, I announced to my alternative school students that we would be initiating a uniform requirement for the next year.

Oh my! I was surprised that the guys in the district office didn't hear the loud and profane dissent all the way across town. I was threatened with petitions, school board visits, and letters to the superintendent. I resisted the impulse to say, "Just kidding," and let the dust settle. One of my teachers brought in some uniform catalogs (pre-digital shopping days). We just left them on the table where the most influential female students gathered for lunch.

Much to my surprise, they came by the office and showed me their choices. They wanted solid color tops and plaid skirts. They couldn't decide on pleats or straight. They suggested tan slacks for the boys and girls, and they had suggestions for the embroidered logo. I was kind of blown away. They said, "It would be kind of cool to be special."

Now this was not your standard alternative school. We were strict about discipline and attendance, and we had a "Learning Community Contract." You had to apply to the school and earn your way in by completing orientation and signing the contract in an actual public meeting. I think the uniform thing could have worked.

The staff hated the idea, but you don't exactly get former drill sergeants working in an alternative school.

But, it didn't matter. The superintendent said forget it—he didn't need another battle with our teachers in front of the school board.

Today I am working in a private Catholic school, grades PK–8, and all the kids wear uniforms. That's a given. When I ask them during our in-class interviews what is the one thing they would most like to change about the school, they resoundingly respond, "Get rid of uniforms."

That's not going to happen. They know it. The school won't allow it. And their parents like uniforms—they like them a lot.

Next time: Do uniforms improve school discipline and climate? The answer is a resounding maybe.

Jim Slosson, Education Committee Co-Chair

THURSTON COUNTY

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION

The Thurston County Assessor's Office administers a property tax exemption program for eligible individuals on an income of \$59,000 or less. It freezes the value of the residence as of January 1 of the qualifying year and reduces the property tax with no lien placed on the property.

QUALIFICATIONS

SENIOR CITIZENS must be 61 years old on December 31 of the qualifying year for relief in the taxes for the following year.

DISABLED PERSONS and **VETERANS** with at least an 80% service related disability have no age limit, but must provide documentation of the disability.

HOME OWNERSHIP AND RESIDENCY

You must own or be purchasing the home by December 31 of the assessment year. The home must be a primary home, not a vacation home. You must occupy the home for more than six months in each assessment year preceding the year in which tax relief is granted.

INCOME

Household income of \$59,000 or less includes all of your taxable and nontaxable income, plus that of your spouse, domestic partner, or any co-tenants. VA disability payments do not count as household income.

DEDUCTIONS

Your income can be reduced by the following: premiums for Medicare Parts A,B,C,D; amounts not reimbursed for prescription drugs; care in a nursing home, assisted living facility, or adult family home; in-home care, including special furniture and equipment; out of pocket expenses for Medicare supplemental insurance premiums; long term care premiums; cost sharing amounts in your health plan's out of pocket maximum; durable medical and mobility enhancing equipment; prosthetic devices; natural medicines prescribed by a state licensed naturopath; medically prescribed oxygen or insulin; disposable devices used to deliver drugs for you; and ostomic items.

WHERE AND WHEN TO APPLY

Apply at the Thurston County Assessor's Office, 3000 Pacific Ave. SE, Olympia. The phone number is 360-867-2200. They are open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. except for holidays.

If you want an exemption for taxes due in 2025, use your household income of 2024. Take with you all income, expense, and disability records for each year you may qualify.

Gail Feagins, Health and Member Services



COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWS

Belated thanks to Jo Edwards, whose name was inadvertently missed last month, for sewing many beautiful mom bags.

My original theme for this article went something like this: after the holiday giving season, we tend to forget that our donations only temporarily provide respite for the daily grind of food and shelter insecurity. The holiday spirit of charity and compassion tends to wane, but the need does not. Please remember to continue supporting your favorite charities.

However, not to minimize the above, at this particular time the enormous need of the thousands of victims of the California fires is unprecedented; it is unfathomable to us as we watch the destruction from the comfort of our intact homes. Therefore, I suggest that our community service be extended to California in the form of donations.

There are many organizations on the ground working to help, so insofar as you are able, please consider contributing to one of them, such as the Red Cross, World Vision, Lutheran World Relief, or any other charitable group affiliation you may have or know of. Even the local NBC channel five and US Banks are set up to accept donations for the Red Cross.

Sadly, I urge you to be wary of scammers' solicitations which have legitimate sounding names or present heart-wrenching stories. Unless you can validate them, the best advice is to stick to organizations you know and trust.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

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LEGISLATIVE REPORT *(Continued from page 2.)*

Here are some of the most important bills we're following:

House Bill (HB) 1292/Senate Bill (SB) 5113 would provide an ongoing cost-of-living adjustment to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. It is the result of many years of hard work and is the ideal solution to restoring benefits. Unfortunately, it also has a price tag.

Like HB 1292/SB 5113, **SB 5085** would provide an ongoing COLA to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. However, it would be funded by merging TRS 1, PERS 1, and LEOFF 1, a closed pension plan for retired police officers and fire fighters, into a single retirement system. The ongoing COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 members would be funded by the \$2.9 billion surplus in LEOFF 1. This would save the state money and is our most realistic path to an ongoing COLA this session.

HB 1312/SB 5114 would end the practice of month-of-death pension prorating. Survivors would be allowed to keep their deceased loved one's entire final pension check.

Questions, comments, or concerns? Contact WSSRA Legislative Coordinator Emmett Mills at 360-413-5496 ext. 2 or emmett@wssra.org.

Emmett Mills, WSSRA Legislative Director



Thurston County school superintendents shared their districts' goals and accomplishments at our January luncheon. We are so proud of our local schools! Left to right: Kirsten Rue, Griffin SD; Troy Oliver, North Thurston Public Schools; Patrick Murphy, Olympia SD; Bryon Bahr, Rainier SD; Chris Woods, Yelm Community Schools; Jennifer Bethman, Rochester SD; Chris Endicott, Tenino SD; Kevin Bogatin, Tumwater SD.

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Please email copy to editortcsra@gmail.com