



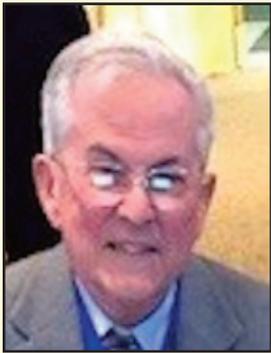
Serving Retirees Since 1956  
Membership Statewide

Summer 2020

# The Reporter

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Ted George



First, I hope this newsletter finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. I'm writing this message in mid-July, and according to news reports, the number of Covid-19 cases is increasing dramatically. Our membership is particularly at risk because of our age, so we need to be extra vigilant in protecting our health.

Second, I want to congratulate over 470 newly retired school employees. Know that your efforts over the years, particularly in the last few months of your employment have made a lasting contribution to the children of Delaware. I still meet former students from time-to-time who bring back fond memories of past days and thank me for positively impacting their lives. I'm confident you'll enjoy the same experience often.

Third, I want to express my thanks to so many retirees who worked over the past months seeking a pension increase and protecting our health benefits. DRSPA Executive Board members and DRSPA members attended numerous State Employee Benefits Committee and Retirement Benefit Study Committee meetings, monitoring actions that these committees took, and voicing pensioners' concerns during public comment portions of the meetings. I'm happy to report that our health benefits remain unchanged – so important during this pandemic.

I also want to thank the members who attended our Legislative Reception in January. The reception gave us another opportunity to explain the pressing need for a pension increase to a majority of the state's 62 legislators. I also want to thank our lobbyist, Terry Spence, and Executive Director, Wayne Emsley, for their effort in developing our pension adjustment plan and implementing a months-long strategy, that began in August 2019, seeking passage of a permanent pension increase process. The feedback that we were receiving as late as February indicated strong legislative support for our plan. And then the pandemic hit, making our much needed pension increase another casualty of the coronavirus.

Finally, I want to assure our members that we are not giving up. We have gone without a pension adjustment for five years. The pandemic did not wipe away the never-ending effect of inflation that slowly makes the value of our pension check smaller and smaller. For example, I retired in 2002, and my pension, along with more than 1,200 others, has lost 30% of its value. We know that Governor Carney does not support a pension increase so we'll focus our efforts in the House and Senate. We'll continue to keep you informed about our efforts in this critical challenge.

Sincerely,

Ted George

**Delaware Retired School  
Personnel Association**  
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## Executive Director's Report

Wayne Emsley



This has certainly been a once-in-a-lifetime (hopefully) event. Like you, my wife and I have been limited to our home, the grocery store and walks on nearby school tracks and in local parks. We've visited with a few close friends recently, meeting outside and observing social distancing. Within the past month, we've gotten really brave and driven to our sons' homes in Boston and Indianapolis. In both cases, we packed our lunches and just stopped at a few bathrooms. By wearing our masks and washing our hands we feel we've minimized our viral exposure.

As I write this in mid-July, recent spikes in Covid-19 infections suggest that we'll be dealing with the virus for quite some time in the future. How is your DRSPA adapting to this "new normal"? First, all of the clerical activities have continued unchanged. Operations like membership mailings and newsletters have been carried out in a home office for years, so state-mandated quarantining had no effect on these activities.

The second change has been to the spring meetings planned for April and May of this year. These meetings had to be cancelled. At the present time, we're planning to hold these meetings in spring of 2021, New Castle County on April 14, 2021 and Kent/Sussex on May 13, 2021.

The third change has been to the Executive Board meetings. These meetings are normally held at a restaurant in Dover. The meeting scheduled for April 1 had to be cancelled. Your officers decided to "kick it up a notch" and held a virtual meeting on June 25. As it turns out, about half of the Board members had already participated in virtual meetings with other organizations or family members. A few members were unable to participate because of other commitments, but on the appointed day, President Ted George called the meeting to order. Board members could see other participants, hear others talking, could speak when they wished to and voted by raising their hand or saying "aye" or "nay". The virtual meeting went so well that it was agreed that the next meeting, scheduled for August 12, will also be a virtual meeting.

Which brings me to the fourth possible change. The Annual Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 28 in Dover. Will it be safe to hold the meeting at that time? All of the DRSPA members are in the "high risk" category. Will they decide to risk infection by attending? We may decide to hold an annual meeting similar to those held in the past, and also provide members the opportunity to view the proceedings on their computer. We'll provide more on the annual meeting in late August or early September.

In the meantime, know that your DRSPA officers and Board members continue to work for you. Stay safe and healthy.

## Legislative Report

Like so many other things in our lives, the pandemic had a devastating effect on DRSPA's legislative effort. As you are probably aware, there will be no increase in pensions for the fifth year in row.

Our legislative effort was moving along nicely until the corona virus hit. Your Executive Board had hired Terry Spence, former Speaker of the House, as our lobbyist. Through his efforts meetings had been held during summer and fall of 2019 with key legislators and officials from the governor's office. Your Executive Board approved a pension adjustment proposal that provided a long term solution by granting a pension increase every other year. Our lobbyist met with nearly every legislator and provided them with a copy of our proposal soon after the legislature began meeting in January.

DRSPA sponsored a Legislative Reception in January, on the same day as Governor Carney's "State of the State" address. The reception was extremely well attended by both the Governor and a majority of legislators. This event provided us with another opportunity to explain the benefits of our proposal – benefits to the State as well as benefits to deserving state pensioners.

Through the efforts of our lobbyist, as well the Executive Director, a sponsor for the bill was identified in mid-February and the bill was in the process of being drafted by a legislative attorney.

Then the virus stopped nearly everything. Both the Senate and House stopped meeting. Legislative Hall was closed to the public and legislators' offices were closed. In short the normal legislative process ground to a halt. At the same time, the state's financial outlook turned from good (an estimated \$180 million surplus) to bleak (an estimated \$400 million deficit).

The legislative session ended on June 30 with both the House and Senate meeting by video conference. Only four time-critical pieces of legislation were passed: the Bond Bill to fund construction projects like schools and

highways, the Grant-in-Aid Bill, which provides funding to volunteer fire companies and non-profits, the General Budget which funds our pensions and health care and a bill to allow mail-in voting, beginning with this November's election.

So where do we go from here? We're certainly not going to give up !! The pandemic will end someday, and state pensioners will continue to see the value of their pensions decline as a result of inflation. Our lobbyist, your officers and Executive Board members will continue to meet with legislators and state officials. DRSPA may need to change our proposal to better accommodate the changing national and state economy.

DRSPA's goal is a dignified retirement for every former school employee. We'll continue to keep you posted on our efforts toward reaching that goal.

### Annual Meeting - Save the Date

The DRSPA State Annual Conference will be held at the Modern Maturity Center, Dover, DE, on Wednesday, October 28, 2020, from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. The cost will be \$20.00 per member. Speakers will include Joanna Adams, Delaware Pension Office, who will provide her annual "State of Our Pensions" report. Faith Rentz, Director of State Benefits, will present "Upcoming Changes in Medical Benefits". Other presentations will focus on issues that are important to retirees. At this time plans for the meeting are unclear due to the pandemic.

Attending this meeting is a great way to reconnect with old friends and colleagues, make new friends, and learn about issues important to Delaware pensioners. Specific information regarding the annual Conference will be mailed to all members in early September.

## Are Our Pensions Safe?

*Most of the information in this article was first printed about five years ago. With the uncertainty that pensioners have observed over the past few months we thought it was a good time to reprint the article. You might want to pass it on to non-member colleagues.*

Over the past few years we've read about the serious financial situations that some municipal and state pension plans have experienced because of the stock market downturn and the changing demographics of our nation. Possible cuts in government services due to reduced tax income are now in the news. Could our pension be reduced? While anything is theoretically possible, the threat to our pensions is extremely remote.

First, we are part of a defined benefit plan. According to David Craik, the former Pension Administrator, "As a member of the Delaware Public Employees' Retirement System (DPERS), you are participating in a defined benefit plan, and your retirement benefits are paid out to you regardless of market events. When you retired, DPERS calculated your monthly pension benefit based on various factors, such as years of service and salary, not investment results."

Second, our pension funds are placed in a trust that is carefully and prudently managed. This means that in the future it is highly likely that funds will be there to pay for our pensions, as well as the pensions of those who retire in future years. As David Craik notes, "Over the last year, the Board of Trustees (Board) of DPERS, through its Investment Committee, has taken material steps to protect the asset value of the investment portfolio. During these challenging market conditions, the Board, Investment Committee, and consultants are constantly monitoring DPERS' investment portfolio. It is important to remember that DPERS is a long-term investor with a time horizon that lasts over decades and that the investment portfolio is well diversified in many different asset classes." In fact, Delaware's pension fund is often cited as a model for other states and municipalities to copy. As a result our fund is 95% funded, meaning that at the moment, our fund contains 95% of the anticipated pension costs for both those who have already retired, as well as active employees who will retire in the future. It

is anticipated that an improving economy will increase this percentage.

Third, our pensions are vested contractual rights which are protected by the federal and state constitutions. According to the Delaware Supreme Court, Delaware's pensions are contractual rights which may not be taken away pursuant to the contract clause of the United States Constitution. Additionally, under the Delaware state constitution, our pension is considered a debt. Article VIII, section 10b states (in part) if, "insufficient revenues of the State are available to pay principal of and interest on such debt when due and payable, the first public moneys of the State thereafter received shall be set aside and applied to the payment of the principal of and interest on such debt. To make up for such insufficient revenues, the General Assembly may increase the rate of taxes and fees..." Or to put more simply, the state must use its funds to pay our pensions before it spends money on anything else.

While no one can accurately predict the future, our pension is extremely secure. We are part of a defined benefit plan, so our pension amount is not at the mercy of an up-and-down stock market. Our pension fund is extremely well managed and is well funded for long-term future benefits. Finally, our federal and state constitutions protect our pension, making it the first obligation for the state's expenditure of funds.



## RBSC Update

On September 13, 2019, Delaware Governor John Carney issued an Executive Order which formed the Retirement Benefit Study Committee (RBSC). The 13-member committee was directed to study the long-term costs of health care for present, and more importantly, future retirees.

New accounting rules require state and local governments to include anticipated health care costs of all retirees, both those who are now retired and also present employees who will retire in the future, an estimated \$8.3 billion liability for Delaware. At the present time a combination of retiree, employee and state contributions have put the health benefit fund well in the black, with a surplus of \$80 million. However the forecast is for health benefit costs to increase dramatically, requiring significant increases in costs for both the state and retirees. The Retirement Benefit Study Committee's task was to develop a series of recommendations that will allow the health benefits to continue at the highest level possible while maintaining a reasonable financial burden for both the state and pensioners.

The RBSC is chaired by Rick Geisenberger, Secretary of the Department of Finance and met four times last fall and winter. DRSPA officials were present at each of these meetings. The committee was to complete its work by March 31, 2020. However it became clear that the task was too big and that the committee would need to continue its work over the spring and summer, with a target of completing the effort by December 2020.

Then the pandemic hit, closing state offices and pushing the committee's task to the back burner as other more pressing needs required the committee members' attention. So where do things stand?

The RBSC last met in March (three days before the pandemic really hit). Secretary Geisenberger hopes to begin meeting again "sometime in September, depending on the virus situation." He is hoping to complete the committee's task by December, but realizes that that may not be possible. What this means for state pensioners is that our health benefit program will continue unchanged for at least another year.

DRSPA's response to the formation of the Retirement Benefit Study Committee has been two-fold. First we have made our position regarding any potential changes clear to RBSC members. During the public comment portion of the meetings, Wayne Emsley, Executive Director of DRSPA, presented your organization's position. He concluded, "So from our perspective as present retirees, we say recommend changes to the health care program if you feel you must, but allow our health benefit costs and coverage to remain at their present levels."

Second, we produced a four-page special issue of *The Reporter* which described the RBSC and its importance to Delaware public school retirees. Copies of that newsletter can be requested at [email@drspa.org](mailto:email@drspa.org) or (302) 672-8252.

DRSPA will continue to monitor the RBSC meetings. Additional reports on any committee actions or recommendations will be provided in future issues of *The Reporter*.

## Want to Help?

At present there are two state-level committees that have the power to change our health benefits – the State Employee Benefits Committee and the Retirement Benefits Study Committee. DRSPA monitors the meetings of both these committees.

We're always looking for volunteers to attend these meetings, which are held in Dover. If you would like to volunteer to assist in this effort, please email us at [email@drspa.org](mailto:email@drspa.org) or call (302) 674-8252. At present meetings are being held virtually. If you attend virtually or in person, there is no requirement to speak, just be an audience member. You'll be providing a valuable service to other retired school employees.

## Legacy Gifts Announced

Are you looking for a way to honor the memory and contribution of a loved one? Would you like to provide a remembrance for yourself, relative or fellow educator? The Delaware Retired School Personnel Association Executive Board recently established a Legacy Gift program that can be used to continue one's contribution into the future.

Legacy Gifts are donations made to the Delaware Retired School Personnel Association either (1) as a donation when the giver is living, or (2) as a planned future donation given through a will or other form of designation. The gift can be a specific dollar amount, as proceeds from a life insurance policy, or securities and/or mutual funds. The giver of the Legacy Gifts intent for the gift will be in writing and be maintained by the Executive Director. Legacy Gifts can be provided anonymously or honor one or more persons by name.

Legacy Gifts can be made to the Legislative Fund, the Awards Fund, or to the General Operating budget. The giver of the Legacy Gift will determine the DRSPA fund that will receive the gift, and the terms for distribution of the funds. In addition, the giver of the Legacy Gift will determine the number of years that the gift provides funds. Legacy Gifts typically have a lifetime greater than one

year. While the Association will accept gifts in perpetuity, it is strongly recommended that Legacy Gifts have a maximum lifetime of 25 years.

Once the Legacy Gift is established, funds supporting the gift will be accounted for separately. The Executive Director will be responsible for distribution of the funds and will report the status of the fund to the Executive Board at least annually.

If you are interested in establishing a Legacy Gift, the first step is to contact the Executive Director, Wayne Emsley by email - [email@drspa.org](mailto:email@drspa.org), phone – (302) 674-5282 or at DRSPA, PO Box 7262, Wilmington, DE 19803.

Wayne Emsley, Executive Director noted that, “DRSPA has a long and proud history of contributing financially to education in Delaware. Over our 64 year history, DRSPA members have provided funds for scholarships, rewarded graduating high school students, and more recently, provided over \$54,000 in *Partners in Education* grants. We want to provide this opportunity of contribute to Delaware education to every former public or charter school employee by establishing the Legacy Gifts program.”

## Delaware families can get the help they need at home

Delaware families now have the option to have a home health aide give medicines to a loved one at home. AARP Delaware helped pass the Share the Care Act a year ago, and regulations became effective June 1st. Before Share the Care, aides were prohibited from giving medicines. This caused many family caregivers (who often work outside the home) to move loved ones to a nursing home. The new law allows families to have an aide give medicines to a loved one.

The Share the Care Act includes safety provisions—special training is required for aides, and medicines must be pre-packaged and labelled. Certain medicines, like opioids, are excluded

“Passing the Share the Care Act was a long fight, but AARP members and volunteers created a real grassroots push to get it done.,” said Sheila Grant, AARP Delaware Advocacy Director. “We knew this was an important issue, because we heard from many families about the difficulty of making sure their loved ones took the medicines they needed, when they needed it. Many caregivers had to leave work in the middle of the day or were forced to skip giving medicines at the right times.”

## Protecting Our Loved Ones in Nursing Homes from COVID-19

Thousands of long-term care facilities in the U.S. have experienced coronavirus outbreaks, and Delaware's own nursing homes aren't exempt. Residents are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their advanced age and underlying health conditions. Worse, studies show the fatality rate for those over 80 is six times that of the rest of us[1]. That's why AARP Delaware is calling for the state to shed light on what is happening in our long-term care facilities, and to take swift, decisive action to ensure the health and safety of residents and staff.

As each day of the pandemic passes, family members, staff and communities are becoming increasingly worried about the health and safety of those inside long-term care facilities. Yet Governor Carney is still not publishing the names of facilities with COVID-19 cases. The lack of transparency from state health officials and facilities only adds anxiety.

AARP Delaware is urging its leaders to protect older adults living in long-term care facilities with a range of steps:

- **Regulators must be more transparent.** The State's Coronavirus Dashboard should include the number of cases in each facility so families know the facts about the risk to their loved ones. In addition, Delaware must ensure a coordinated statewide approach to testing, with adequate supplies and staffing to meet the demand.
- With strict prohibitions on visitation in place, **facilities must proactively work to connect loved ones virtually** with video chats or phone calls, and regularly

update family members about their loved one's health and wellbeing.

**Facilities must ensure that the needs of all residents are met**, and have contingency plans in place when staffing is insufficient to meet those needs. The state should require facilities to immediately report when staffing is insufficient and summon assistance, such as deploying the National Guard or strike teams, to provide care until staffing levels are adequate.

- **No Immunity**—Nursing homes and other long-term care facilities must be accountable for the care they provide. Delaware should not strip away the rights and protections of residents.

If you are concerned about the safety of a loved one living in a nursing home, contact the Delaware Long Term Care Ombudsman at 800-223-9074. Families and caregivers can also find additional information and resources about COVID-19 at [www.aarp.org/coronavirus](http://www.aarp.org/coronavirus).

Coronavirus has meant most residents can't have in-person visitors. But it does not mean families can't have answers. It's time for full transparency and disclosure now, because information empowers families to act, speak up, and protect those we love.

[1] [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30243-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30243-7/fulltext)

This story is provided by AARP Delaware. Visit the AARP Delaware page for more news, events, and programs affecting retirement, health care, and more.

### Manufactured-Home Help

By The AARP Bulletin , September 01, 2019 12:00 AM

Do you live in a manufactured home and worry about land rent increases and other fees?

AARP Delaware wants the more than 70,000 First Staters who live in such homes to know about a new resource—the Delaware Manufactured Home Owner Attorney Fund.

Under a recent law supported by AARP, homeowners who believe they are being hit with unfair rate increases on land leases will have access to legal help.

Having a home on rented land can leave owners, especially those on fixed incomes, in a bind if the landlord imposes rent increases or fees.

The new fund, paid for by part of a small fee already levied on owners of manufactured homes, allows them to join together and get legal representation.

For more information, go to [aarp.org/de](http://aarp.org/de).



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## Upcoming Meeting Dates

<b>Executive Board</b>	August 12, 2020
<b>Annual Meeting</b>	October 28, 2020
<b>Executive Board</b>	January 13, 2021
<b>Executive Board</b>	April 7, 2021
<b>New Castle Co Meeting</b>	April 14, 2021
<b>Kent/Sussex Meeting</b>	May 13, 2021

## HOW TO CONTACT US

**Mail: DRSPA, P. O. Box 7262,  
Wilmington, DE 19803**

**Our phone number is: 302-674-8252**

You may also contact us via our website or email for upcoming events, pension office news, the link to our state legislators, and other DRSPA information.

**Our email address is: [email@drspa.org](mailto:email@drspa.org)**

**Our web site address is: [www.drspa.org](http://www.drspa.org)**



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