

2026 COLA

19,000 Longer-Retired Members See Pension Increases

On July 12, 2026, the state legislature passed and the Governor signed into law the first cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for SERS members in more than 20 years.

Approximately 19,000 members who retired on or before July 1, 2001, qualified for the increase. The individual [increases range from 15% to 24.5%](#) of each member's July 2026 gross pension payment, with higher increases for those who have been retired longer.

Last month, we issued each recipient their first monthly increase, as well as a lump sum retroactive payment for the increase in July and August.



The COLA was approved as part of the commonwealth's 2026-27 budget negotiations. The actual legislation, Act 2026-21, included a provision that the increase should not be used to determine a member's eligibility for other state benefits and programs unless its exclusion is otherwise prohibited by state or federal law.

Unlike many other state retirement systems, SERS does **not** have automatic COLAs. Each COLA is created

continued on page 2

COLA CAUTIONS

Last month we began paying the [first cost-of-living adjustment \(COLA\) in more than 20 years](#).

Unlike many other state retirement systems, SERS does **not** have automatic COLAs.

Under current law, a separate bill must be passed to authorize and fund any new COLAs. That means proposed COLAs must compete with other funding priorities through the state budget process.

For years, our [Guide for Retiring Members](#) has cautioned members to, "plan that your pension payments will never increase in retirement." (p. 15)

That can be tricky when you're planning for 25, 30, or more years into the future and you're seeing inflation take a larger bite out of your pay today.

continued on page 3

HOW TO NOMINATE AN ESTATE OR TRUST AS YOUR BENEFICIARY

More and more state employees are naming their estate or trust as their beneficiary.

If you wish to **name your estate or trust** as either a principal or contingent beneficiary, please follow these instructions.

- In the **Full Name** column, list **"Estate"** or **"Trust"**
- In the **Date of Birth** column, provide the date of the trust
- In the **Address** column, provide the name and address of the executor or the trustee

Please verify all information before mailing the form. If the form contains errors, it will be returned to you, and you will need to complete a new form.

If you have questions about nominating a beneficiary, please contact a SERS pension plan specialist at **1.800.633.5461**.

These instructions apply only to the Defined Benefit Plan (pension plan). If you are enrolled in the Defined Contribution Plan (investment plan) and/or the Deferred Compensation Plan (voluntary

DEFINED BENEFIT PLAN BENEFICIARY NOMINATION FORM

All entries should be typed or legibly printed.



MEMBER INFORMATION	
Full Name (First, MI, Last) Jane Q. Public	SSN XXX-XX-0000
Street Address 123 Any Street	
City, State, Zip Any Town, PA 17000-0000	

This form is a legal document. Your designations here apply **ONLY** to your SERS defined benefit pension. You must file a separate form to designate beneficiaries for any other retirement benefits, including SERS-administered defined contribution and deferred compensation plans. If more than one contingent beneficiary is listed, they will share equally unless you direct a different distribution. It is very important that your intent is clear. If you do not clearly identify your beneficiaries or if your form contains alterations, SERS might not acknowledge it; and your death benefit could be paid to your Estate. This form can be found at www.SERS.pa.gov.

This form is not valid until properly filed. SERS will review your form and send you an acknowledged/mailed copy for your records.

Principal Beneficiaries Upon your death, any remaining balance of your pension benefit shall be paid to the listed principal beneficiaries. Please check the payment instruction box you choose. (Descriptions of the payment instructions are on page 2.) If you wish to not display your beneficiary information on your Annual Member Statement please notify SERS in writing.

☒ Pay to one person, Estate or Trust ☐ Pay to more than one person absolutely
☐ Pay to more than one person, Estate or Trust in equal shares with rights to survivors ☐ Pay in designated percentages as shown

%	Full Name (First, MI, Last)	Date of Birth	Address (Street address, city, state, Zip+4)
100%	Jane Public Trust	9/21/2026	Executor: John Public, 123 Any Public Street Any Town, PA 17000

100% Total must equal 100%

Contingent (Second) Beneficiaries Upon your death, if there are no surviving principal beneficiaries, any remaining balance of your pension benefit will be paid to the listed contingent beneficiaries.

%	Full Name (First, MI, Last)	Date of Birth	Address (Street address, city, state, Zip+4)

Total must equal 100%

2026 COLA (CONTINUED)

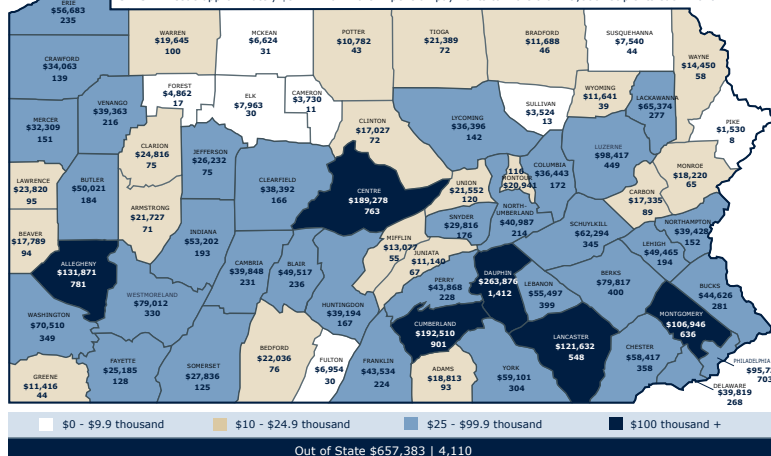
"With the legislatively defined funding mechanism covering the cost over the next ten years, there will be no increase to the employer contribution rate for this pension increase," said SERS Executive Director Joseph Torta. "As fiduciaries to the SERS Fund, we will continue to monitor the funding closely and report to the board each year."

The recipients of the 2026 COLA are the group of members who retired **before** the benefit enhancements in Act 2001-9 increased benefits for most commonwealth employees.

2026 COLA SERS Monthly Pension Increases & Recipients By County

(as of 9/15/2026)

SERS will issue approximately \$3.7 million more in pension payments to more than 19,000 recipients each month.



Full size map available online at:

<https://sers.pa.gov/pdf/SERS-COLA-Payment-Map.pdf>

CHECK YOUR RETIREMENT-READINESS PLAYBOOK

October is National Retirement Security Month and there is still time on the clock to make at least one play this month to improve your retirement security.



- **If you currently work for a SERS-participating employer:**
 - o Consider saving more for retirement through the voluntary, supplemental [Deferred Compensation Plan](#) that offers tax-deferred benefits.
 - o If you participate in the [Defined Contribution Plan](#) and/or [Deferred Compensation Plan](#), schedule a retirement-readiness check-in with a local plan specialist who can meet with you one-on-one at no additional cost.
 - o Sign into your retirement plan account, which helps protect your information from unauthorized access by bad actors.
- **If you're retired and participate in the [Defined Contribution Plan](#) and/or [Deferred Compensation Plan](#):**
 - o Schedule a check-in with a local plan specialist to review your investment account spend-down plan.
 - o Sign into your retirement plan account, which helps protect your information from unauthorized access by bad actors.

A Strong Defense Against Scams

No matter where you are in your retirement planning journey, a strong defense against scams is your best play to protect your personal information and retirement savings!

Join us for an online webinar in November on current fraud trends, common scam warning signs, and practical steps you can take to strengthen your account security.

November 12: [Registration Link](#)

November 18: [Registration Link](#)

COLA CAUTIONS (CONTINUED)

Here are a couple ideas to consider:

- In your early years of retirement, budget to use only a portion of your monthly pension payment and save or invest the rest. Then use more of your monthly pension payment in later years.
- Use your supplemental [Deferred Compensation Plan](#) account (or any other personal investment account) as a personal COLA by deferring withdrawals from your investments until later in retirement.

No matter how you plan for retirement, remember that COLAs are not guaranteed.



pennsylvania

STATE EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM

30 NORTH 3RD STREET, SUITE 150 | HARRISBURG, PA 17101-1716

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