

THE Mentor

News from the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System

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MARYLAND
STATE RETIREMENT
and PENSION SYSTEM

Legislative update



SEVERAL PIECES OF PENSION LEGISLATION

were passed by the Maryland General Assembly during its recently concluded session in Annapolis. The following bills were delivered to Governor Wes Moore who may sign a bill into law, veto the bill or allow the legislation to become law without his signature.

House Bill 625/Senate Bill 489:
State Retirement and Pension System – Board of Trustees – Responsibilities and Duties

See Update, page 3



Your three most common pension questions answered!

Account information, disability benefits, and refunds are top topics among member FAQs

OUR STAFF ANSWER more than 100,000 telephone calls and 25,000 pieces of written correspondence each year. Here are answers to the three questions we hear the most.

Where can I find my account information?

Members can access their retirement account any time using the Maryland State Retirement Agency's secure website **mySRPS**. Log in to review your current account data including your enrollment date, years and months of service credit, accrued contributions and interest, annual salary and designated beneficiaries.

Users of **mySRPS** also can instantly generate estimates of future retirement benefits.

If you're interested in the laws and policies that govern your pension plan, that information can be found online, too. Each retirement system is explained in a detailed **Benefits Handbook**. Not sure which handbook applies to you? No problem! Log into **mySRPS** and click the link at the bottom of the View Account page to access the handbook for your system of membership.

The Retirement Agency website also features **videos**, **pamphlets** and **other resources** explaining your pension benefits.

What happens if I become disabled?

In addition to the retirement benefits you earn for your years of employment, the Retirement Agency

See Questions, page 4

Preserve your valuable pension benefits during a leave of absence

A DECADES-LONG CAREER

in public service is seldom interrupted. An illness, welcoming a child to your family or a return to school could result in a break in service. An unpaid leave of absence like this could affect your pension, but it doesn't have to. Follow these steps to preserve your future retirement benefits.

Filing for a qualified leave of absence

To protect your benefits, you must properly file for a qualifying leave of absence. Proper filing ensures that if you die while on an approved qualifying leave, your pre-retirement survivor benefits for your beneficiaries remain in effect. Proper filing also makes you eligible to purchase or claim the leave period later if you wish to add to your service credit.

Before your leave of absence begins, submit a *Qualified Leave of Absence Request OR Notification of Military Service Entry (Form 46)* with the Retirement Agency, as well as any forms your employer requires. Your employer also must certify that the leave has been approved for one of the following reasons. Under Maryland law, only the following types of leave qualify:

- Personal illness (This means *your own* illness, not the illness of a family member.)
- Birth or legal adoption of a child
- Temporary assignment with another governmental employer
- Study
- Military service



Under to pension law, birth or legal adoption of a child is one justification for a qualified leave of absence. Other acceptable reasons are personal illness, temporary assignment with another governmental employer, study or military service. Regardless of the reason, you must submit a Qualified Leave of Absence Request OR Notification of Military Service Entry (Form 46) before taking unpaid leave.

If you take an unpaid leave of absence for reasons other than those listed, your active membership ceases during the leave and your accrued service credit will be affected.

An approved leave of absence may last for a maximum of two years.

Watch the video *Qualifying Leave of Absence* for more details.

Purchasing service credit after your leave

To obtain retirement credit for your leave period, you must pay any missed contributions plus applicable interest. Submit a *Request to Purchase Previous Service (Form 26)*. You may purchase the time you were

absent at any time during employment or, if you separate from employment, within 60 days after the leave of absence expires.

Claiming credit for military service

If your leave of absence was for military service, submit a *Claim of Retirement Credit for Military Service (Form 43)* as well as proof of military service. You do not need to pay missed contributions and interest for an approved leave of absence taken for military service. See the pamphlet *Guide to Military Service* for more details.

Update, from page 1

In the past, members of the Maryland State Retirement and Pension received an annual Personal Statement of Benefits by mail. With the advent of the Maryland State Retirement Agency's secure website, **mySRPS**, members can instantly view personal account data that are current and more detailed. This legislation will complete the transition away from paper statements. For members without access to the internet, the Agency can provide this information via telephone.

House Bill 966/Senate Bill 706:

Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System – Reemployment as Sheriff
These bills would require the System to suspend the retirement benefit of a LEOPS retiree who, within one year after retirement, is elected as a sheriff. After the retiree ceases employment as sheriff, the retiree's retirement benefit would be reinstated, including any cost-of-living adjustments that were payable while the benefit was suspended. The legislation would not apply to any LEOPS retiree who retired before July 1, 2024.

House Bill 768/Senate Bill 604:

Judges' Retirement System – Special Death Benefit
For active members of the Judges' Retirement System, this legislation would establish a line of duty death benefit. A similar benefit currently is available to members of all other SRPS systems except the Legislative Pension Plan.

House Bill 1004/Senate Bill 880:

State Retirement and Pension System – Average Final Compensation – Adjustments

With the exception of a salary increase resulting from a promotion or election to public office, a salary increase of more than 20% is generally not included in the calculation of a member's pension benefit. This legislation creates two additional exemptions to this rule. These exemptions include salary increases intended to:

1. address inequities in compensation among employees in the same position classification or
2. increase the compensation to be more consistent with market compensation.

House Bill 1005/Senate Bill 972:

Correctional Officers' Retirement System – Membership

This legislation would enroll into the Correctional Officers' Retirement System employees of the Maryland Department of Health who are employed at certain MDH facilities in the following positions:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Associate – Court Involved (CI)
- Developmental Disability Associate – CI
- Direct Care Assistant – CI
- Licensed Practical Nurse – CI
- Resident Associate Secure Evaluation and Therapeutic Treatment (Unit) – CI
- Security Attendant

Senate Bill 368: *State and Local Retirement and Pension Systems – Military Credit – Eligibility*

This legislation would permit members and former members who served *at any time* with the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or the Coast and Geodetic Survey to claim military credit toward their future pension benefit, provided they first attain 10 years of service credit earned through employment as a member.

Senate Bill 143: *Teachers' Retirement and Pension Systems – Reemployment*

This legislation would clarify that the superintendent of each Maryland school district may hire up to five retirees in any capacity and at any facility within the superintendent's school district without those retirees being subject to an earnings limit. The legislation is retroactive to July 1, 2020.

House Bill 1212: *State Retirement and Pension System – Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Governance Program*

This legislation would require the Maryland State Retirement Agency to hire a director of diversity, equity and inclusion.

mySRPS is the key to your pension account

WHAT CAN YOU DO with **mySRPS**, the Maryland State Retirement Agency's secure website?

You can:

- Find out when you can retire and generate benefit estimates
- Project your future pension with added credit for military service, unused sick leave and future pay raises
- View and update your beneficiaries (Do you remember who you selected

when you enrolled?)

- View account information, such as your years and months of service credit and accumulated contributions
- Print an asset verification letter for a landlord or lender
- Check your home address in Retirement Agency files

Signing up for **mySRPS** is easy. Visit **sra.maryland.gov** and, in the top right of the homepage, click on **mySRPS Login**. Click **Register** and follow the instructions to receive your

registration code and packet by mail.

Once registered, you'll be able to obtain benefit estimates based on different retirement dates, beneficiary choices and salaries. You also can generate separate estimates for all the payment options that will be available to you at retirement.

Curious to see when you can retire and how much your benefit will be but don't want to wait on the phone or fill out cumbersome paper forms? Sign up for **mySRPS** today!

Questions, from page 1

also provides disability retirement for members who become disabled.

There are two types of disability retirement, ordinary and accidental/special.

Ordinary disability applies to any permanent mental or physical incapacity that prevents you from doing your job.

Accidental or special disability also cover a permanent mental or physical incapacity that prevents you from doing your job. However, for accidental or special disability, the incapacity must have arisen from a work-related accident. For members of the Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System and State Police Retirement System, this includes a disability arising out of and

in the course of the actual performance of duty, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The Retirement Agency provides valuable resources for members considering disability retirement. We offer online **videos** that explain disability benefits and the filing process. If you prefer, this information also is provided in **pamphlet** form.

If you believe you may be eligible for disability retirement, contact the Retirement Agency immediately.

Can I cash out my pension?

Members who resign from employment may consider withdrawing their accumulated contributions from their retirement account. For persons who intend never to return to an employer

who participates in the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System, a withdrawal may sound attractive. However, because this is an irrevocable decision, there are some important questions you should consider. Read **Leaving Employment** in the winter 2024 edition of *The Mentor* for more information.

Other topics

Another frequent subject of member inquiries is health insurance. The Retirement Agency does not administer health benefits for active members or retirees. For questions about your health benefits, contact your employer.

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