

# Ohio PERS NEWS

YOUR BENEFIT CONNECTION

News and information for active members of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System

Traditional  
Pension Plan

## Legislative changes to joint and independent retirement effective March 23

Senate Bill 42 was signed into law by Governor John Kasich at the end of 2014, and is effective March 23. Several provisions in the bill impact OPERS members, including one provision on joint and independent retirement.

still not be awarded service credit from more than one system for time worked concurrently. The transferring system will not certify more than one year for any “year” of service credit as determined by the transferring system.

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The updates to joint retirement will provide members with service credit in OPERS, and SERS and/or STRS, the choice to retire from each system independently or to receive a joint retirement benefit from the retirement

system with the most service credit and contributions.

Members will be able to evaluate which alternative is more financially advantageous.

Under the amended statutes governing joint retirement, the transferring system will continue to certify service credit to the system paying the benefit. Members will

Independent retirement, permitted by the new law, will also allow members who are no longer contributing to OPERS to refund their contributions from OPERS without a reduction in service credit with SERS or STRS, as long as they’re not currently employed with the same public employer that was their last public employer under OPERS.

An example would be if you are working for two different divisions at a state university and contributed to OPERS and SERS or STRS for each position.

For more information, view the “Retiring From Public Employment - The Traditional Pension Plan” and “Terminating Public Employment” leaflets available at [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) under Member Publications.



## Got Mail? Get Answers. New section of OPERS website

Ohio PERS NEWS – Your Benefit Connection is a quarterly newsletter providing news and information to more than 374,000 active members of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System. An active member is anyone currently contributing toward an Ohio PERS retirement benefit. This publication allows us to communicate vital information concerning retirement benefits to our active members and also educate them on the services we provide.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

www.opers.org

1-800-222-7377

Monday - Friday

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

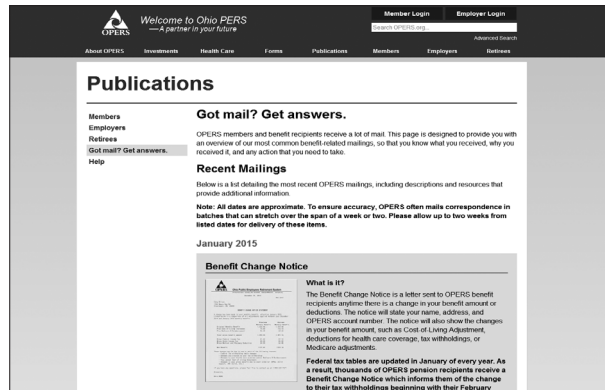
newsfeedback@opers.org

It is your responsibility to be certain that OPERS has your current address on file. If OPERS is not made aware of address changes, we cannot guarantee that you will receive important information pertaining to your OPERS account.

This newsletter is written in plain language for use by members of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System. It is not intended as a substitute for the federal or state law, namely the Ohio Revised Code, the Ohio Administrative Code, or the Internal Revenue Code, nor will its interpretation prevail should a conflict arise between it and the Ohio Revised Code, Ohio Administrative Code, or Internal Revenue Code. Rules governing the retirement system are subject to change periodically either by statute of the Ohio General Assembly, regulation of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement Board, or regulation of the Internal Revenue Code. If you have questions about this material, please contact our office or seek legal advice from your attorney.

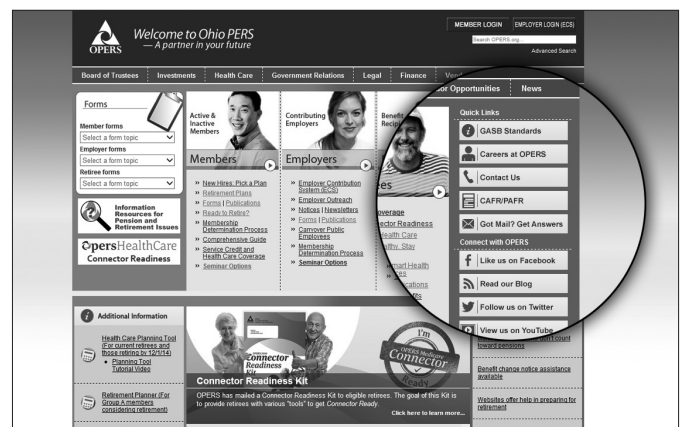
OPERS is not required to provide health care coverage to retirees or their dependents and will only do so at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

As an OPERS member, we know you receive a lot of mail. That's why we now offer a section of www.opers.org called "Got Mail? Get Answers." This page is designed to provide you with an overview of our most common account-related mailings, so you know what you received, why you received it, and any action that you need to take.



You can view a detailed list of the most recent OPERS mailings, including descriptions and resources that provide additional information.

To access this page, simply click on the "Got Mail? Get Answers" quick link located on right side of the opers.org home page.



## 2015 Educational Offerings

### Seminars and online resources

#### Ready to Retire Pension and Health Care Seminars (Group A)

These back-to-back seminars will review important pension and health care changes and how they will impact your retirement.

To register for a seminar, log into your online account or call 1-800-222-7377.

<b>Bellville</b> April 14	<b>Sharonville</b> May 12	<b>Toledo</b> June 16
<b>Columbus</b> April 28	<b>Mentor</b> May 19	<b>West Chester</b> June 30
<b>Cleveland South</b> May 5	<b>Portsmouth</b> June 8	<b>Cambridge</b> July 14

#### Webinars and online recorded presentations

Can't attend an in-person seminar? Register for a live, interactive webinar or view a recorded presentation - on your time, at your convenience. Webinars are tailored to each Retirement Group and include Ready to Retire webinars for Group A and Education Today for Retirement Tomorrow webinars for Groups B and C.

Recorded online presentations can be viewed at any time and registration is not required. These presentations cover topics ranging from re-employment and refunding your account, to disability benefits and how to view your annual statement. There is even a recorded presentation designed specifically for law enforcement members with non-law enforcement service credit.

To register for a webinar or to view a recorded presentation, visit [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org), and click on Educational Opportunities.

## Ohio PERS Board of Trustees

The 11-member Ohio PERS Board of Trustees is responsible for the administration and management of Ohio PERS. Seven of the 11 members are elected by the groups that they represent (i.e., college and university non-teaching employees, state, county, municipal, miscellaneous employees, and retired members); the Director of the Department of Administrative Services for the state of Ohio is a statutory member, and three members are investment experts appointed by the Governor, the Treasurer of State, and jointly by the Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives and the President of the Ohio Senate.

#### Elected Board Members

**Charles Latsa**  
State College and University Employees

**Sean Loftus**  
County Employees

**Christopher Mabe**  
State Employees

**John W. Maurer**  
Retired Members

**Cynthia Sledz**  
**Chair**  
Miscellaneous Employees

**Ken Thomas**  
Municipal Employees

**Steve Toth**  
Retired Members

#### Statutory Board Member

**Robert Blair**  
Director, Department of Administrative Services

#### Appointed Board Members

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Investment Expert Governor Appointee

**Robert Smith**  
Investment Expert Treasurer of State Appointee

**James R. Tilling**  
Investment Expert General Assembly Appointee

**Karen Carraher**  
*Executive Director*

# Legislative update

## New leadership in the Ohio legislature



In January, the OPERS Government Relations team welcomed back members of the Ohio General Assembly and U.S. Congress as they began new legislative sessions in Columbus and Washington, D.C.

Ohio's congressional delegation remains the same after the November 2014 election; however, there are a number of new faces at the Statehouse.

In addition to 29 new state legislators, the Ohio House of Representatives ushered in new leadership.

Representative Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) replaced term-limited Representative Bill Batchelder (R-Medina) as Speaker of the House.

Representative Fred Strahorn (D-Dayton) replaced term-limited Representative Tracy Heard (D-Columbus) as minority leader.

On the Senate side, Senate President Keith Faber (R-Celina) remains in his leadership position, as well as minority leader Senator Joe Schiavoni (D-Boardman).

Want to know which legislator represents you and your district in the Ohio House of Representatives or Senate? Visit [www.ohiohouse.gov](http://www.ohiohouse.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) to view a district map and look up your state legislators.

### **The OPERS Government Relations team continues to educate legislators on important issues of interest in 2015 and beyond, such as:**

The implications of new GASB standards for public pension systems' and public employers' accounting

OPERS' continued opposition to proposals requiring mandatory Social Security coverage for our members

Advocacy on health care issues, such as biosimilar pathways, lower exclusivity periods and ways to reduce the cost of prescription and specialty drugs

The multiple ways OPERS is good for Ohio's economy, via benefit payments to retirees, ensuring they have income in retirement that keeps them from having to rely on other safety net programs like Medicaid or SNAP

OPERS' continued support for retirement options for all Ohioians in the workforce, both in the public and private sector

Visit the Government Relations page on [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) to view a complete list of the current bills OPERS is actively monitoring for its members. You can also find special reports and publications including, "I Am OPERS: Supporting the People Who Support Ohio," "Good for Ohio," and the monthly Government Relations newsletter, "OPERSource."

## Leaving your OPERS account on deposit after termination of public employment

When you terminate public employment, you may leave your account on deposit with OPERS until you choose to take a refund of your account, receive a retirement benefit, attain age 70½ or until your death. If you leave your account on deposit, be sure to keep your personal information and beneficiary designations current with OPERS.

Visit [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) and register for an OPERS online account, to update your contact information and view your account online.

If you leave your account on deposit after terminating employment, you may have the opportunity to receive certain benefits upon reaching the eligible age criteria. These benefits may be impacted by your years of service credit. In addition, your employee contributions continue to earn interest.

### Benefits of leaving your account on deposit

In each retirement transition group, you have earned a reduced retirement benefit with at least 60 contributing months of service credit in the plan. If you are in retirement group A and B, you may apply to receive a reduced retirement benefit at age 60. If you are in retirement transition group C, you may apply to receive a reduced retirement benefit at age 62.

With 18 months of contributing service credit in the plan and with three of those months occurring two-and-a-half years immediately before death, you have earned survivor benefit protection for qualified survivors.

With at least 60 contributing months in the plan, if you become permanently disabled within two years of termination of your public employment, you may file for disability benefits. Disability coverage only extends to illnesses and injuries that occur before you terminate your contributing service, as well as illnesses and injuries that result from your contributing service, but do not become evident for up to two years after you terminate contributing service.

As a Traditional Pension Plan participant, you continue to earn interest on your employee contributions and amounts paid to purchase service credit. The interest granted each year is the interest rate in effect at that time. The rate is set annually by the Board of Trustees.

To be eligible for OPERS retiree health care, you need to have at least 20 years of qualifying service credit and be at least age 60 or at any age with 30 years of qualifying service, if your retirement effective date is Jan. 1, 2015 or later.

### If you choose to terminate public employment and refund your account, the following requirements do apply:

- Three months must pass from the date you terminated public employment as certified by your employer.
- If you return to public employment before the refund is issued, you are not eligible to receive a refund.
- If you are eligible to retire and are legally married at the time you request a refund, spousal consent is required. OPERS will provide you with a spousal consent form.

Keep in mind, to be eligible to refund your account, you must completely separate from public employment.

For more information, visit [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) to read the “Terminating Public Employment” and “Retiring From Public Employment - The Traditional Pension Plan” leaflets.

You can log into your OPERS online account to run an estimate of the benefits you may forfeit by refunding your account. You can also schedule an appointment with an OPERS counselor to discuss the benefits you have earned and what you may be forfeiting by refunding your account. Call 1-800-222-7377 or log in to your online account to schedule an appointment.

## Changes coming to Member-Directed and Combined Plans

OPERS offers its members three different retirement plans - the Traditional Pension, Member-Directed and Combined Plans. These plans provide different features and allow certain members to select a retirement plan that best fits their needs and retirement goals.

OPERS offers certain members the opportunity to change the retirement plan to which they contribute should their retirement goals and needs change during their career.

Most members in the Traditional Pension Plan who had less than five years of service credit as of Dec. 31, 2002, and most members who began employment on or after Jan. 1, 2003, are eligible to plan change and participate in either the Member-Directed or Combined Plans.

Currently eligible members have three opportunities to change the retirement plan to which they contribute. In an effort to simplify the retirement plan change process for members, OPERS is reducing the number of plan changes from three to one effective July 1, 2015.

Most members do not change retirement plans. The overwhelming majority who change plans do so only once.

New rules, effective July 1, 2015, will allow eligible members to make one plan change at any time during their career, not just during the specified

time periods. All eligible members will have an opportunity to make one plan change no matter how many times they've changed plans prior to July 1, 2015.

**A change in your retirement plan should not be taken lightly and you should consider career and life changes that might occur in the future.**

Plan change forms received at OPERS on or after July 1, 2015 - which will be effective Aug. 1, 2015, and after - will count as a member's one plan change opportunity during their career.

**If you plan change from the Traditional Pension Plan to either the Member-Directed or Combined Plan, you cannot move your balance to those plans or purchase your Traditional Pension Plan service in either plan. Your balance and service credit must remain in the Traditional Pension Plan and you can start over in the new plan.**

You will have service credit in two retirement plans. In most instances, service cannot be aggregated between the plans to determine your

eligibility for benefits or to calculate your benefits.

A change in your retirement plan should not be taken lightly and you should consider career and life changes that might occur in the future.

For more information refer to the "Changing Your Retirement Plan for Members in the Traditional Pension Plan" leaflet at [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) under Member Publications. If you are seriously considering a plan change, log into your OPERS online account or call 1-800-222-7377 to schedule a plan change counseling session.

OPERS staff recently conducted a review of the Member-Directed and Combined Plans and as a result, OPERS is making changes to the plans, which you should be aware of if you are considering a plan change. The review also included an assessment of the Member-Directed Retiree Medical Account. These changes will go into effect July 1, 2015 and Jan. 1, 2106.

For more information on the plan changes coming to the Member-Directed and Combined Plans, visit [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) to view a chart outlining the changes.

## OPERS social media

Find us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

### PERSpective

*PERSpective* is the OPERS blog where we share our thoughts on important pension-related issues. Subscribe to *PERSpective* by clicking on the RSS feed logo on [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org), or read it regularly at <http://perspective.opers.org>.



### Facebook

More than 5,500 members and retirees “Like” our Facebook page, which uses the name “Ohio PERS.” Be sure to “like” us on Facebook in order to receive updates from OPERS within your newsfeed.



### YouTube

The OPERS YouTube channel, “OhioPERS1,” features a number of videos covering hot topics such as OPERS health care, finance and investments, and other OPERS news.

### Twitter

We also utilize a Twitter account under the name “ohiopers.” Facebook and Twitter messages are used to inform people of news, events and items of interest. Follow us on Twitter by searching @ohiopers.



## Ready to retire?

### Resources to help you prepare for retirement

**OPERS Medicare Connector: Connector Readiness Section of the OPERS Website** - In 2016, retirees and spouses age 65 and over and enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B will purchase health care coverage via the OPERS Medicare Connector. The Connector will provide retirees with affordable choices and one-on-one help in selecting an individual plan. Visit the Connector Readiness section of [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) for detailed information about the Connector, the basics of Medicare, and the Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) allowance.

**OPERS Health Care Plan 2016 Preview Guide** - This guide was designed to help you better understand the changes to OPERS health care plan and answer many of your questions.

**2016 OPERS Medicare Connector Recorded Online Presentation** - This online recorded presentation, featuring OPERS Health Care Director Marianne Steger, provides you with the most up-to-date information regarding the OPERS Medicare Connector.

**Ready to Retire: Learn, Plan, Act** - If you are eligible to retire on or before Jan. 7, 2018 (Group A) this section of [www.opers.org](http://www.opers.org) can help you identify the most ideal time frame for retirement and make an informed decision regarding your retiree health care coverage. These pages offer detailed information on the steps you need to take as you move toward retirement. You can also find a link to the OPERS Retirement Planner, an innovative tool that allows you to estimate both pension and health care costs at different retirement dates.

**Message about re-employed retirees** - OPERS is separating its health care plan between two groups: retirees and re-employed retirees. We will be discussing this with the OPERS Board of Trustees in upcoming months. After that we will know what type of options will be available to our re-employed retirees. Unfortunately there isn't much more information we can provide until after the Board meets.



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## Reminder: Annual statements mailing in March

Your *2014 Personal Statement of Estimated Benefits* provides you with information about your OPERS account and is designed to work in tandem with the account information available online.

OPERS began mailing annual statements mid-March and will continue mailing statements through April. Don't be concerned if a co-worker receives his statement before you receive yours. Statements will be batched by ZIP codes and mailed to home addresses on a staggered schedule beginning in March.

Your annual statement includes your total contributions, account value, service credit totals and beneficiary designations through Dec. 31, 2014. Your statement also

provides a basic estimate of your retirement benefits; however, you can run a variety of retirement benefit estimates, based on your current OPERS account, by logging in to your online account.

Log in to your online account and select the Documents tab to view your statement online. If you have not already done so, you are encouraged to register for an online account.

Your annual statement is full of valuable, personalized information. If you misplace your statement or require a duplicate for any reason throughout the year, you can view and print a copy of your recent statement through your online account.