

# PSERS Active Member Newsletter

Volume 2 - 2021

A publication of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Public School Employees' Retirement System

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## PSERS Active Certified And Active Non-Certified Board Elections

The PSERS Board of Trustees will conduct two elections this fall. One is for an active certified member and one for an active non-certified member, each to serve a three-year term on the Board beginning January 1, 2022. Certification is issued by the Department of Education.

Members desiring to run for election for the **active certified** member/participant seat must:

- Be an active certified member of the System or Class DC participant (certified voting status designated on the annual *Statement of Account*).
- Submit an affidavit and nominating petition with 500 or more valid signatures from among the PSERS active, certified members and participants. Five different employers must be represented by no less than 25 signatures each.
- Submit a completed biographical form.

Members desiring to run for election for the **active non-certified** member/participant seat must:

- Be an active non-certified member of the System or Class DC participant (non-certified voting status designated on the annual *Statement of Account*).
- Submit an affidavit and nominating petition with 250 or more valid signatures from among the PSERS active, non-certified members and participants. Five different school entities must be represented by no less than 15 signatures each.
- Submit a completed biographical form.

Due to the ongoing pandemic-related school closures and virtual education, the Board election process will be conducted later this year. Members may request to receive a nomination packet and more information on the duties and responsibilities of Board members **on August 2, 2021**. Interested members may write or email to:

Mercedes Evans  
PSERS Election Coordinator  
5 North 5th Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17101  
[mercevans@pa.gov](mailto:mercevans@pa.gov)

Your completed affidavit, nominating petition, and biographical form must be returned to Ms. Evans at the email address or mailing address above **by 5:00 p.m. on September 21, 2021**. Late receipt will disqualify any candidate from the election ballot.

Publication #9288



@PA\_PSERS



@PennPSERS

## Follow PSERS on Social Media

Follow PSERS on social media for retirement information, educational videos and fact sheets, PSERS investment highlights, and more! PSERS is on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (PA Public School Employees' Retirement System)!



## Coming Soon: Class Election Calculator for Class T-G Members

PSERS is excited to launch an online calculator to assist new PSERS members in selecting a PSERS membership class. New PSERS members have 90-days to make a final and binding decision: whether to remain Class T-G or to elect into Class T-H or Class DC. This class election calculator will estimate a potential retirement benefit for each of the membership classes based on the member's age, starting salary, and projected year of retirement. This calculator is **NOT** a retirement calculator as it does not contain all of the retirement options and associated information, but it is intended to help new members see which membership class best suits their future retirement needs.

In addition to the calculator, PSERS also offers class election videos and a presentation on our website.

## Planning for Retirement

If you are planning to retire within the next 12 months, be sure to:

- Request a staff-prepared estimate by submitting a *Request for Retirement Estimate* (PSRS-151), which is available on the PSERS website and the Member Self-Service (MSS) Portal or by calling PSERS at 1.888.773.7748. Keep in mind: Your actual date of retirement is determined by your last paid day of employment, timely submission of your *Application for Retirement* (PSRS-8).
- Contact your employer to discuss benefits available such as payment for unused vacation, sick leave, sabbatical leave, and health insurance. PSERS also offers health insurance to retirees through the Health Options Program (HOP). See page 3 for more information.
- Consult with a financial planner or tax consultant, if needed.
- Contact the Social Security Administration regarding your benefits, if applicable.
- Research your employer's guidelines for retiring, terminating, and resigning.
- Review helpful resources on the PSERS website such as the online estimate calculator, tax calculator, pamphlets and handbooks, and the *Countdown to Retirement* checklist.
- If you have not already done so, view our recorded Foundations for Your Future (FFYF) educational programs. **The recorded presentation is available on our website under *Nearing Retirement>Foundations for Your Future*.**
- Schedule and attend a small group Retirement Exit Counseling session. Be sure to bring your staff-prepared estimate to your counseling session. **All Retirement Exit Counseling sessions are conducted online for your safety and the safety of our staff.**

For a more detailed checklist about preparing for retirement, visit our website and select *Nearing Retirement>Countdown to Retirement*.

If you have questions as you prepare for retirement, contact PSERS.



## PSERS Provides Health Benefits Too

Planning for retirement is important. PSERS provides eligible members with a pension benefit and the opportunity to enroll in retiree health coverage designed especially for our members. Comprehensive medical, prescription drug, dental, and vision coverage is provided through the Health Options Program.

### Welcome to the Health Options Program

Most members enroll when they turn age 65 and become eligible for Medicare. Many people feel that the basic level of Medicare (called Original Medicare) is not sufficient to meet their needs. We provide two options for improving their coverage:

1. A **Medicare Supplement plan** (sometimes called a Medigap policy), such as the HOP Medical or Value Medical Plan, pays all or part of the deductibles and/or coinsurance the member would have to pay if they only had Original Medicare
2. A **Medicare Advantage plan** (also known as a Medicare Part C plan), such as the Aetna, Highmark, UPMC, Blue Cross Blue Shield, etc. plan options, will replace Original Medicare entirely.

### Premium Assistance—A Special Advantage

Participating in the Health Options Program may entitle a member to a special financial incentive that is not available with a commercial program such as AARP. If a member is eligible for Premium Assistance and enroll in the Health Options Program, PSERS will pay up to \$100 per month toward their monthly premium. Over the course of their lifetime, on average, a member could save up to \$24,000 or more. Additional information is available at [HOPbenefits.com](http://HOPbenefits.com).

### Look for Our Logo!

**HOP**

HEALTH OPTIONS PROGRAM



[WWW.HOPBENEFITS.COM](http://WWW.HOPBENEFITS.COM)®

If you don't see our name, the coverage is not provided by PSERS. Most likely, you are also receiving information from AARP, your local Blue Cross Blue Shield office, and other organizations offering health coverage and Medicare prescription drug (Part D) coverage. These plans are not sponsored by PSERS, which means they do not provide the benefits and advantages described on [HOPbenefits.com](http://HOPbenefits.com).

## PSERS Board of Trustees Meeting Schedule

**June 10-11, 2021**

**August 5-6, 2021**

**October 7-8, 2021**

**December 1-2, 2021**

PSERS Board meetings are held in Harrisburg at PSERS, located at 5 N 5th Street.

In addition to Board meetings, Committee meetings are held throughout the year. All PSERS Board meetings are open to the public.

For exact meeting times or if you would like to attend and require an accommodation to participate, please call Tivia Danner, PSERS Executive Office at 1.888.773.7748, extension 4617.

**PSERS is proud to be an equal opportunity employer supporting workforce diversity.**

**PSERS**

**5 N 5th Street**

**Harrisburg PA 17101-1905**

**Toll-Free: 1.888.773.7748**

**Local Calls: 717.787.8540**

**FAX: 717.772.3860**

**Website Address:**

**[psers.pa.gov](http://psers.pa.gov)**

**Email Address:**

**[ContactPSERS@pa.gov](mailto:ContactPSERS@pa.gov)**

## Pension Forfeiture

Your career in public education is a noble endeavor. By your example and leadership, you have the power to shape the minds, behaviors, and attitudes of children and adults in your care.

But that power does not mean your public retirement benefit is not in jeopardy when you commit a crime.

The Public Employee Pension Forfeiture Act (“Forfeiture Act” or “Act 140”) requires the forfeiture of your retirement benefits when you commit a crime in your capacity as a public employee, or when your public employment puts you in a position to commit a crime. PSERS has no discretion with respect to forfeiture.

The list of forfeitable crimes in the law captures all offenses classified as felonies, some misdemeanor crimes, and anything punishable by a term of imprisonment exceeding five years. The list includes, but is not limited to: various theft statutes; forgery; tampering with records; bribery; perjury; misapplication of entrusted property and property of government or financial institutions; tampering with public records or information; criminal attempt, solicitation and conspiracy; murder; voluntary manslaughter; involuntary manslaughter; aggravated assault; retail theft; identity theft; bomb thefts; distribution of a computer virus; corruption of minors; unlawful contact with minors; and the sexual offenses listed in Chapter 31, Subchapter B of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code.

The list of forfeitable crimes doesn’t stop at Pennsylvania’s borders. The Forfeiture Act includes all federal criminal offenses and another state’s laws that are substantially the same as any forfeitable Pennsylvania crime.

Committing the crime outside your PSERS-related workplace can also lead to forfeiture.

In 2002, the Commonwealth Court found that a member forfeited her PSERS benefits even though her crime was related to her public employment position as a tax collector and not her school employment. *Public School Employees’ Retirement Board v. Matthews*, 806 A.2d 971 (Pa. Cmwith. 2002). The ruling, cited in other forfeiture cases, states: “Act 140 contains no requirement that the pension benefits that are forfeited be necessarily connected to the public employment related to [the] crime the public employee committed.”

Therefore, PSERS reminds you: Don’t do the crime if you don’t want to lose the time (and your retirement benefit).

## PSERS Board Chairman and Vice Chairman Election

PSERS Board of Trustees voted to elect a chairman and vice chairman at the annual public organizational meeting (Jan. 14, 2021) held at PSERS headquarters. Both positions have one-year terms and are responsible for running PSERS public Board meetings in accordance with Pennsylvania law.

Trustee Christopher SantaMaria, an active certified member representative, was re-elected to the post of board chairman. Trustee Francis X. Ryan, who represents the state House Republican Caucus, was re-elected vice chairman.

Mr. SantaMaria has been a trustee since 2017. He is a social studies teacher in the Lower Merion School District in Montgomery County. He was formerly president of the Lower Merion Education Association. Mr. SantaMaria holds a bachelor’s degree in history from Washington College and a masters’ degree in education from Cabrini College.

Representative Ryan has been a trustee since 2019. He is an elected state representative, representing parts of Lebanon County. He is a certified public accountant and retired Marine Reserve colonel. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Mt. St. Mary’s College and a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Maryland.

The 15-member Board of Trustees is an independent administrative board of the Commonwealth. The Board stands in a fiduciary relationship to the members of PSERS regarding investment decisions and disbursements of the System’s funds. The Board also performs other functions outlined in the Public School Employees’ Retirement Code, such as certifying contribution rates, authorizing the actuarial valuation and independent audit of the System, and publishing an annual financial statement of the condition of the Retirement Fund. In addition, the Board oversees the operational activities performed by the System’s Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer.

## PSERS Member Self-Service Portal Reaches Three-Year Milestone

PSERS Member Self-Service (MSS) Portal launched in 2018. Since then, PSERS has **saved more than \$1 Million in printing and mailing costs** through MSS' Paperless Delivery option. As of February 28, 2021, PSERS has sent nearly 2.8 million pieces of correspondence electronically!

Thank you for your continued commitment to help PSERS **Go Green!** If you do not receive your correspondence electronically, PSERS encourages you to register for an MSS account and retain Paperless Delivery.

Members also completed over 255,000 transactions online. Commonly completed transactions include:

- Retirement Estimates
- Nomination of Beneficiary
- Address Change
- Income Verification

PSERS continues enhancements to the MSS Portal to improve user experience. Upgrades to MSS this fall will make it easier to access your account through mobile devices.

### Keep Your Account Secure

One of the most critical and easiest steps you can take to keep your accounts safe is to register them online. If you have not registered your PSERS MSS account, you are at a greater risk of having your accounts compromised. Fraudsters, for example, like to target unregistered accounts that they can set up with their own data points like phone number and email address. As a result, you are more secure by registering your accounts online.

## Now Available in PSERS MSS Portal: Secure Messaging

Secure Messaging is now available in your PSERS Member Self-Service (MSS) account! Secure Messaging allows you to contact PSERS directly in the MSS Portal. Your conversations with PSERS retirement representatives are confidential and retained for your convenience.

### Why Secure Messaging?

- **Enhanced Security** – Conversations in Secure Messaging are linked to your PSERS account. You will not have to provide any personally-identifiable information through email for PSERS to verify your identity. Furthermore, PSERS retirement representatives will be able to discuss your account details with you through a more secure method than email.
- **Faster Responses** – PSERS prioritizes member-specific messages received within the secure MSS Portal over generic emails received to our general resource account or through our website contact form.
- **Messages Retained in MSS** – All of your retirement information will be in one place at your fingertips in the MSS Portal, including your correspondence with PSERS. You'll even have the ability to filter messages to make certain correspondence easier to find.

### How will Secure Messaging Work?

You can send a secure message of up to 4,000 characters through the MSS Portal. You will then be notified by email once a response has been posted in your account. Coming later will be the ability to include attachments with your secure messages to PSERS.

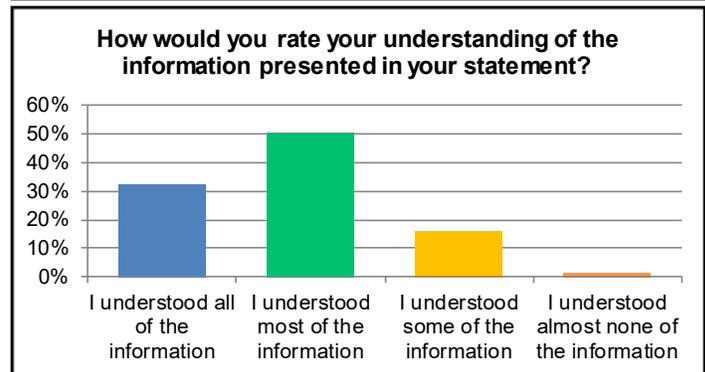
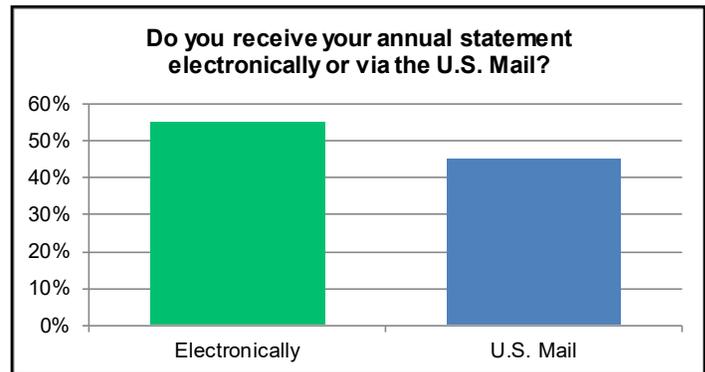
To send a secure message in your MSS account, click on **Send a Secure Message** in the **Quick Links** section of the **Home** tab or go to the **Contact PSERS** tab.

# PSERS Statement of Account Survey Results

We are pleased to share the Statement of Account survey results! A total of 3,744 members participated in the survey.

Of the respondents:

- 55% received their statement through paperless delivery.  
**Want to receive your statement electronically?** Registering for a Member Self-Service (MSS) account automatically enrolls you in paperless delivery. You may opt out of this service at any time on the "Paperless Delivery" tab in your MSS account.
- 82% understood most or all of the information on their statement.  
**Questions on your statement?** PSERS provides Understanding Statement of Your Account presentations on our website to walk you through each section of your statement.



## We hear you!

Your feedback matters to us. Below are answers to frequently asked questions in the Statement of Account survey responses.

### ***If I take a lump-sum payment, will I still receive a monthly benefit payment?***

At retirement, you have the option to withdraw all or part of your contributions and interest in a lump sum from your defined benefit account. Depending on your membership class, you could still receive a monthly defined benefit payment, but it will be reduced. If you have a defined contribution account with PSERS, you may withdraw all or part of the value of your account at any time after terminating by electing one of the payment options available, including the ability to annuitize the lump sum.

For more information on your retirement options, visit [psers.pa.gov](http://psers.pa.gov).

### ***How do I opt out of Paperless Delivery?***

To opt out of Paperless Delivery, sign into your MSS account and go to the **Paperless Delivery** tab. If you cannot access your account, please write to PSERS indicating that you would like to opt out of Paperless Delivery. Please include your full name, PSERS ID or Social Security Number, and signature in your request.

## We value your feedback!

PSERS will be sending more surveys to you to improve our services. We want to know what is important to you and what you would like to see from us!

## PSERS Behind the Scenes

### Introduction to PSERS' Bureau of Benefits Administration (BBA)

*Mission: The Bureau of Benefits Administration (BBA) upholds PSERS' mission to serve the members and stakeholders of the system by providing timely and accurate payment of benefits, maintaining a financially sound system, clearly communicating member and employer rights and responsibilities, and effectively managing the resources of the system.*

### Processing Member Benefits Accurately and Efficiently is Our Top Priority

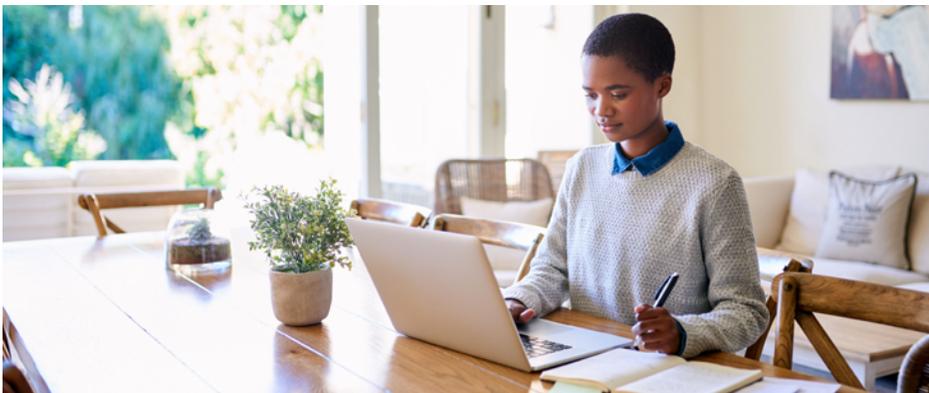
BBA is charged with maintaining accurate account data, determining membership and benefit eligibility, and calculating benefits for PSERS members. BBA staff review, analyze, and update data in member accounts to ensure accuracy. To increase efficiency, employees in BBA are cross-trained to work in various business areas based on operational needs within the bureau.

BBA is composed of the Member Account Division and Benefits & Exceptions Division that work closely together to ensure data integrity and the timely payout of benefits.

- The Member Account Division reviews data and information prior to processing a member's account to ensure data integrity. This division also processes purchases of service, account adjustments, and refunds of contributions and interest.
- The Benefits & Exceptions Division processes benefits such as retirement applications, death benefits, domestic relations orders, multiple service elections, and return to service. The division also issues disability determinations and handles complex retirement calculations.

### Commitment to Our Members

BBA employees currently work from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They quickly adapted to a teleworking environment to continue to protect the accuracy of member data and process benefits timely. BBA has also been able to maintain and, in some instances, exceed expected processing time frames during the pandemic.



## Borrowing from Your Retirement Account

You may **NOT** borrow from your account. To protect your PSERS benefit until retirement, the Public School Employees' Retirement Code prohibits members from borrowing money from or against their Defined Benefit or Defined Contribution account.

Funds in your PSERS account cannot be used for collateral and, generally, cannot be attached or assigned. You will receive funds from your account only when you terminate service and apply for a retirement or a refund of your contributions and interest.

Additionally, you may not liquidate your monthly benefit into a lump-sum payment when you retire.

**PSERS**  
**5 N 5th Street**  
**Harrisburg PA 17101-1905**

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