
From: rerscott <rerscott@comcast.net>
Sent: Saturday, November 6, 2021 12:39 PM
To: Office State Actuary, WA
Cc: Fitzgibbon, Rep. Joe
Subject: FW: Urgent Need for ongoing PERS 1 Cost of Living Adjustment !

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Hello,

I am a 34th district constituent of Representative Joe Fitzgibbon.

I am writing to intensely urge you to do everything you can to implement a True and Realistic annual Cost of Living Adjustment for PERS 1 Retirees in the upcoming Washington State Legislative session !

The creation of a annual COLA for PERS 1 retirees needs to be more reflective and realistic of PERS 1 retiree ongoing standard of living maintenance needs, than the past Uniform COLA the legislature eliminated in 2011 ! Given that COLA was limited to 3% annually, it did, and does not come even close to meeting the Cost of Living needs of Retirees over the last 10 years !

As a PERS 1 retiree, my health insurance is comprised of original Medicare, and the Health Care Authority Uniform Medical Classic Plan, as supplemental to Health cost, and primary for Prescription Drugs and Dental. Over the previous 7 years my UMP Medical Plan has increased an average of 6.17 % annually ! The last two years the plan has increased 8.6 % and 7.7 % respectively ! It is my understanding the UMP plan Medicare eligible retiree cost increases, are primarily driven by the increases in Prescription drugs ! Regardless of the reason, these annual insurance increases come out of my pocket and reduce my standard of living !

Yes – I could enroll in an Advantage Plan for Medicare, and reduce my monthly health insurance cost. But I am reluctant to do so. Just this last 2018 year, I was diagnosed with Esophageal cancer ! I had major surgery which removed my esophagus and part of my stomach. This was followed by 4 months of Chemo therapy. As a vitally important element of my treatment, I met with more than one Surgeon, as well as more than one oncologist – and evaluated more than one possible Hospital where my surgery might occur. I was able to talk with these medical professionals about my condition and treatment, without having to worry about the cost, or if my insurance would cover it. This provided me with the ability to make the best possible decisions concerning this life threatening situation ! As scared and stressed as I was during this period, I had confidence in my insurance plans. I am not entirely sure I would have felt the same, if I had been enrolled in an Advantage plan. I should not have to be forced into a different Health Insurance decision, as a result of the continuing cost increases of my UMP plan and it's effect on my standard of living !!

A further reduction to my Standard of living is the ongoing increases in my Residential home property taxes here in Seattle. In the ten years since the Legislative elimination of the UNCOLA, my property taxes have increased an average 5.6 % each year. I have lived in my Seattle home for over 30 years, and am now paying more in property taxes on a monthly basis, than I paid monthly on my Home Mortgage years ago !

Without a COLA to make up for increases to the cost of living in my home, I am seriously not sure how many more years I can live in my house, given these ongoing property tax increases, which again come out of my pocket, and annually reduce my standard of living !

As further general evidence of the need for a serious cost of living adjustment for PERS 1 retirees, I reference a Seattle Times article dated December 20, 1919 – Pre Pandemic – which states: “the Cost of living in Seattle rose from the 35th highest among large U.S. cities in 2012, to the 6th highest in 2018, and ranked near the top in every category of consumer expenditures !! “. This is just in the last 10 years following the Legislature’s elimination of the PERS 1 UCOLA !

Another reference to a Seattle Times article dated October 24, 2019, states “Natural Gas bills are going up an average of 14% in the years ahead !

And – of course if further rational and justification of a PERS 1 ongoing COLA is needed, you only have to reference recent news of the Rising Inflation rate due to the Pandemic and supply chain restrictions. Per experts, current inflation is the highest it’s been in the last 30 years. As a result, Social Security benefits are already scheduled to increase by over 7 % for next year 2022.

The Washington State Legislature needs to Honor and protect it’s PERS 1 retirees by creating in law, an ongoing annual COLA tied to an index which reflects a Consumer Price Index inclusive of factors which incorporate the continuing high cost of Medical Services and Drugs !!

Thank You

Robert Rhea
West Seattle

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