

RI CHAPTER 94 NEWS, MARCH 2023

Legislative Outlook, 2023 **By Chapter 94 Leadership**



At our February meeting, Stephen Alves and Robert Jacquard of Capitol Strategies Group outlined our COLA proposal soon to be introduced in the General Assembly. We have been working

with this firm since December. Our mutual goal is to gain financial relief for state retirees. Our bill, already drafted, has two sponsors, Representative Pat Serpa, and Senator Hannah Gallo.

Our bill would amend RI § 36-10-35, "Additional benefits payable to retired employees" by providing a COLA of up to 3% on the first \$30,000 of pension benefits, subject to annual appropriation by the legislature. Like Massachusetts, the proposed COLA would be funded from the state's annual budget and not from the pension fund.

As of mid-February, our proposal does not yet have a bill number. The draft, under review by the staff at Legislative Council, needs an assigned number before it can be introduced into the legislature. Once the bill is published, our lobbyists expect more members of the General Assembly to sign on as co-sponsors.

We've received many comments from Chapter members, asking why are we now proposing COLA legislation. In the past, we've supported COLA proposals that were stalled in committee, including the RIPERC-initiated plan that called for fractional COLAs. During the last two legislative sessions, these bills were stuck in committee, never reaching the floor. Upon the advice of our lobbyists, we decided to pursue another tack, a bill of our own.

We give a big shout-out to members who attended the meeting in February or joined by Zoom. We're serious about getting some financial relief this session. Last September we drafted an RFP for lobbying services and published it on several online job boards. We realized that advancing any

Next Chapter Meeting

Tuesday, March 14 @ 1 pm
RI Council 94, LaBonte Room
1179 Charles Street, No. Providence, RI

Special Guests

Dan McGowan
The Boston Globe
Reporter Covering Rhode Island

Questions?

Contact Chapter 94 Vice Presidents
Russ Marsocci and Ron Pepin

Russ Marsocci, Muni VP

401-339-9224

pbruins49@verizon.net

Ron Pepin, State VP

401-323-8021

ron.pepin.chapter94@gmail.com

Cindy LeBlanc, Office Manager

401-642-2434

clebanc@ricouncil94.org

Can't attend in person? Join us via Zoom and attend meetings online. Email Ron Pepin to receive an invitation and log in instructions.

Save the Dates

April 11, 2023

Next Chapter Meeting
Warwick Central Library
600 Sandy Lane, Warwick

May 18, 2023

Chapter 94 Day of Golf
at Kings Crossing Golf Course

July 27, 2023

Second Annual Summer Outing
at Wright's Farm

Help Wanted

Editorial assistant needed for the newsletter
Contact the office if interested.

(Leg, cont) COLA legislation we proposed would require experience and clout on Smith Hill. Based on what we heard at last month's meeting, we've hit a home run by engaging Stephen and Bob.

Our lobbyists will guide us on the next steps once our bill is introduced. When the Finance committee sets a hearing date for our bill, we will need all hands on deck. As you know, legislation doesn't get passed because it's a good idea. Constituents making calls to State senators or representatives often quickens their attention on legislation. We know by feedback from legislators themselves that email petitions don't work. Success in achieving legislative victories is driven by real contacts by Rhode Islanders. We'll share our grassroots efforts in future newsletters,

State Report and More, Ron Pepin

You may be leaving money on the table if you use VIA for your state-provided Medicare reimbursement. Did you know that VIA reimburses many out-of-pocket medical expenses?

While you can log on to access your VIA account at VIAbenefitsaccounts.com, like many Chapter members, I prefer to use the VIA app. It is available to download at the Apple App Store or Google Play Store for Android users.

Through VIA, you may be reimbursed for your dental, vision, hearing, and some medical expenses provided you have receipts.

If you have not done so, create an account at VIAbenefitsaccounts.com or sign on to your existing account. Once logged in, you can see how much money you receive from the State each month and what you have left in your account. If you decide to apply for reimbursement, go to the link, "*Out of Pocket Reimbursements*" and answer some questions before attaching your receipts. If you're in the habit of taking photos of receipts with your phone or tablet, uploading and sending documentation to VIA is simple.

VIA will review your receipts and respond by email, approving or denying your request. If approved, VIA will send your reimbursement to the bank account you have on file.

If you need help using the VIA App or applying for reimbursement in general, please send me an email with your phone number and include the best

Join or Renew Your BJ's Membership Promotion ends March 31, 2023

Call **800-313-8887** and when prompted use our Group Reference Number: **350012**.

*Have your payment method ready.
Renewing members need to provide current membership number.*

This is the only way new and existing BJ's members can get cash bonus added to their accounts.

From Ron Pepin, State Vice President

*"I just renewed my BJ membership.
No problem. The new enrollment process works."*

NEW BJ's MEMBERSHIP RATES

Choose an **Inner Circle** Membership
\$25 for 12 months with a \$10 bonus

Choose a **Rewards** Membership
\$75 for 12 months with a \$20 bonus

RENEWING BJ's MEMBERSHIP RATES

Choose an **Inner Circle** Membership
\$55 for 12 months with a \$10 bonus

Choose a **Rewards** Membership
\$110 for 12 months with a \$20 bonus

The bonus is electronically loaded to your membership card and will be available at the register in 24 hours from when your membership is processed. The bonus must be used within 30 days on an in-store purchase. These are electronically loaded so you will not receive a coupon or gift card.

(State, cont) time you can be reached. I will call you to provide some help you navigate VIA. Or, if you come early to a Chapter meeting, I am available to help. **(RP)**

Muni Report and More, Russ Marsocci

Although I handle municipal retiree issues, I urge all members to keep up with our efforts to secure a COLA for state retirees. We value the work of our lobbyists, but we will need members to make sure our proposal gets out of committee and is headed to both chambers of the General Assembly for passage. This means, once we get the bill number, we will ask all Chapter 94 members to call their state reps and senators and urge them to vote for our bill. We've heard from many elected officials—phone calls from constituents work. Emails get lost in the myriad of messages that often flood

(Muni, cont) their inboxes. And forget about email petitions. Many end up in a spam folder.

We may do a phone bank, “a call your legislator event,” during or after a Chapter meeting. We have an electronic version of the RI Legislators Directory, contact me or Ron and we’ll send you a copy. Hard copies are also available near the sign-in book at meetings.

Here’s my municipal update: Our litigation with West Warwick Schools is headed to court. West Warwick Schools changed retiree spousal coverage and we’re fighting to restore this benefit.

West Warwick members, if you have questions about survival benefits and verifying your beneficiaries on file at ERSRI, contact ERSRI, directly, at (401) 462-7611 to confirm that your information is correct. Download a beneficiary designation form at ersri.org. The completed form must be notarized before submitting it to ERSRI.

We continue our outreach to Coventry police and we are monitoring any changes the Town is considering that affect retired police.

I’m looking forward to our May golf event. If you haven’t swung a club in a while, you may want to head to the garage, basement, or driving range to see if muscle memory works. The \$20 registration fee is the best golf deal around. Complete the registration form on the back of this newsletter and return it with payment by May 4, 2023. If you don’t golf but want to come to meet members and hang out, join us for the cookout, starting around noon. For \$10, you’ll get food and a 50/50 raffle ticket. Fill out the registration form and remit your payment to the office.

We’re open to ideas for future events. Some suggestions include a High-Low-Jack tournament, bowling, and even bocci. Another suggested a Chapter 94 book club. Different strokes, I guess. Send me your suggestions for future activities. **(RM)**

Help Wanted: We need writers, researchers, proofreaders, and an assistant editor. Think about joining in on the fun. Enjoy taking photos? We can use you too. Just call the office and leave a message that you want to help.

Special message from the Executive Board

The Board voted recently to create a PAC, a Political Action Committee. It’s a vehicle which allows us to make political contributions to candidates who support issues important to public sector retirees.

State law prevents us from using dues money for contributions, so we’re exploring ways to fund our political action program within the parameters of the law.

Contact Russ Marsocci or Ron Pepin if you’re interested in getting involved or serving as a PAC officer.

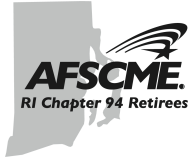
Union or Non-Union, by Dolores Bresette

I’m starting to like this writing gig. I answered a call when we needed articles for the newsletter when the Chapter Executive Board decided to increase the number of pages and content to include stories written by retirees. If I can string some words together to create a couple of paragraphs, I challenge you to do the same.

Many retirees continue to work part-time after they’ve left a state or municipal job. Some take non-union jobs.

Non-union work means you’re an at-will employee. An employer can terminate you at any time, for any reason that is not illegal or discriminatory. Protections we took for granted when our work was covered by a collective bargaining agreement, in many cases, may not exist. In a non-union job, You could lose a job if you missed work due or illness or a family emergency. Or for idiotic reasons, such as having a hairstyle the boss doesn’t like.

Working after your shift is supposed to end happens a lot, sometimes off the clock. If a job is itinerant, often employees don’t receive travel pay. You can’t ask for your steward or invoke your Weingarten rights if the boss starts to bully you. Because you don’t have these protections. A union contract helps to keep fairness at work. Our rights on the job are in the contract. I appreciate, that during my years with the state, I had a union to back me up when dealing with workload, hours, and being treated fairly. I saw a coffee mug that said “if you have a boss, you need a union.” How true.



First Annual RI Chapter 94 Retiree Golf Outing

Thursday, May 18, 2023
Kings Crossing Golf Course
655 Old Baptist Road,
North Kingstown, RI

Registration @ 9 am
Shot Gun Start @10 am

*Join us for a fun day of golf.
Play for bragging rights
in this non-competitive event.*

*Longest drive contest (men & women)
Closest to the pin (men & women) and more*

Golf: \$15 per person, \$60 for a foursome
*Includes 9 holes of golf, riding cart, cookout
and a 50/50 raffle ticket*

Cookout only: \$5 per person
Includes cookout and 50/50 raffle ticket

**Minimum of 36 golfers needed
or the event is canceled.**

Don't have any golf buddies?
We'll find a group for you.

Questions?
Russ Marsocci, Muni VP
pbruins49@verizon.net
401-339-9224

Mary Riley, Golf Coordinator
cuffriley@yahoo.com

PA Smith, Golf Helper
pasmithgolf@gmail.com

RI Chapter 94 Retirees Office
401-642-2434

Registration
RSVP by May 4, 2023

Checks payable to
AFSCME RI Chapter 94 Retirees
1179 Charles St, North Providence, RI 02904

Player(\$20)_____

Phone with area code_____

Email_____

Player(\$20)_____

Phone with area code_____

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Player(\$20)_____

Phone with area code_____

Email_____

Player(\$20)_____

Phone with area code_____

Email_____

Social, No Golf

Cookout Only (\$10)_____

Phone with area code_____

Email_____