

RI CHAPTER 94 NEWS, APRIL 2023

Legislative Report **By the Chapter 94 Leadership**



Here is our legislative update: Besides our proposal (3% COLA on the first \$30,000, subject to annual appropriation), which, as of this writing, is waiting for an assigned bill number, four pension

COLA bills were introduced in the General Assembly, S0215, H5038, H5316, and H6118. An earlier submitted bill, H5216, was withdrawn. Similar to our proposal, S0215 and H5038 would provide a 3% one-time stipend on the first \$30,000, subject to annual appropriation by the legislature after 2024. RIPERC's fractional COLA bills, H5240 and S0222, are also in the mix.

With multiple proposals, we know COLAs have grabbed the attention of many legislators. Our plan is to help these bills can gain momentum with grassroots support so they cannot be left to stagnate in committee or get tabled for further study. We're optimistic that state workers will win some long-sought-after relief.

We encourage members to follow the progress of these proposals as they weave through the legislature by signing up for **RI Bill Tracker**. Visit the General Assembly website at <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/> and click on the "Legislation" tab on the top menu bar. Next, click on the "Bill Status and Tracking" link. On the Bill Status and Tracking page, you will see a section labeled "Email Alerts." Click on the "Subscribe" link in this section. You will be asked to provide your name and email address. Enter this information and click "Submit."

Next Chapter Meeting

Tuesday, April 11 @ 1 pm
Warwick Central Library
600 Sandy Lane, Warwick
Lunch at Greenville Inn to follow

Questions?

Contact Chapter 94 Vice Presidents
Russ Marsocci and Ron Pepin

Russ Marsocci, Muni VP

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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 join meetings online. Email Ron Pepin to receive an invitation and log-in instructions.

Save the Dates

May 9, 2023

General Membership Meeting
and "Call Your Legislator" Phone Bank

May 18, 2023

Chapter 94 Day of Golf
at Kings Crossing Golf Course
RSVP by May 4

June 13, 2023

New meeting added to schedule

July 27, 2023

Second Annual Summer Outing
at Wright's Farm
Reservation Forms
Available in May and June Newsletters

You will receive an email with a link to confirm your subscription. Once you confirm, you will get email notifications whenever there is an update on the COLA bills you are tracking.

We need your help to get our bill or the other COLA bills passed by the legislature. We've scheduled a "call your legislator hour" after our May meeting. We'll provide pizza, drinks, and a list of legislators' phone numbers. Please bring your cell phones and join our communal phone bank. Emails and online petitions don't carry the weight of a personal phone call. Many elected officials have told us that calls from constituents work. And it doesn't take many calls for a legislator to take notice.

Since we're a small state, we often see our reps and senators out and about— shopping at a grocery store, grabbing a coffee at a local establishment, or even at church. One member told us that she saw her state rep at a local library, and they had a 15-minute chat about the pension system and reinstating COLAs. So, the next time you see your rep or senator, use it to talk about reinstating COLAs. **MC, RM, RP**

RIPTA Data Breach

We've asked members to complete the ACLU questionnaire in its efforts to prepare for a potential suit against all parties involved in the breach that exposed personal data of RIPTA employers, current, former, and retired state workers. Filling out the survey will help the ACLU determine the composition of the class and assess the damage. Contact our office, 401-642-2434, to obtain the survey.

State Report, Ron Pepin

After nearly two decades of service to the Chapter, retired state worker and Slaven Award recipient Jim Racine submitted his resignation to the Executive Board last month. We will miss Jim and the dependability,

reliability, and sensibility he brought to every meeting. Jim, enjoy your second retirement.

The Board appointed Mary Riley, former Council 94 executive vice president, to fulfill Jim's term until the next Chapter election. Mary previously served as a Chapter trustee, leaving us a vacant trustee position. Trustees are the watchdogs, ensuring that our resources and assets are used for legitimate Chapter purposes. Please inform Russ or me if you are interested in becoming a trustee.

On March 13, three days after U.S. regulators took control of the Silicon Valley Bank Friday morning, the Rhode Island General Treasurer issued the following statement, reassuring stakeholders, including current retirees, that the pension fund's diverse investments minimized its risk exposure. Read on.

"The financial challenges Silicon Valley Bank faced were unique to its structure and management...Rhode Island's exposure has been limited. The Employee's Retirement System of Rhode Island has invested in a stock index fund that held some assets in SVB. Additionally, the retirement system has a limited amount of fixed-income exposure to SVB within two externally managed portfolios. As of the end of February, assets invested in SVB totaled less than 0.016% of our total portfolio, reaffirming our state's principle of broad diversification and partnering with financial managers that seek the highest levels of financial security."

At least 26 public pension funds throughout the country have sustained some losses due to the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. Some blame the 2018 rollbacks of the Dodd-Frank law, which was designed to allow for safer lending and investment practices.

But, here's a bank you can count on, the RI Community Food Bank, our designated charity. We are still collecting monies for the RI Community Food Bank. If you can't make the meetings, you can always donate by check, payable to RI Chapter 94. Please write

RI Food Bank in the memo line. You may notice a collection tin labeled Food Bank at every meeting at the sign-in table. Since January, \$43 has been deposited into the can. Thank you to everyone who has and will donate to this special cause. We can't predict when or if we, or someone we know, will need some help. Thank you again for your support. **RP**

Municipal Report, Russ Marsocci

I am pleased to report that Chapter 94 President Mike Connolly and his rehab are progressing nicely. Mike's recovery has been long and arduous. We wish him well, too. Mike sends his best regards and looks forward to returning to meetings soon.

Mark your calendar! We're taking the show on the road. Warwick Central Library, 600 Sandy Lane, is the site of the April meeting. The Executive Board meets at 11:00, and the membership meeting starts at 1 pm. After the meeting, join the Executive Board for lunch at the Greenville Inn. Specifics will be announced at the meeting.

The Executive Board has decided to add a meeting in June. This allows us to do a legislative review, conclude old business before the seasonal break, finalize details about the summer outing at Wright's Farm, and plan a special event for late June.

The West Warwick Pension Board is still functioning, handling some remaining issues. The meetings are online, and I encourage WWPERC members interested in the proceedings to access the Town's website, westwarwickri.org, to catch up on Board business. We are working to resolve a few issues remaining from the pension system's transition to MERS.

If you haven't received your 1099R for the 2022 tax year, please call the ERSRI Member Service Center at 401-462-7600 to request a replacement. You can also access your 1099R by clicking on the red banner at the top ERSRI webpage, <https://www.ersri.org/>.

Chapter 94? Council 94?

We are Chapter 94, not Council 94. Although our parent union AFSCME charters both, each affiliate has a separate membership, elected officers, executive boards, and dues. Council 94's constituency is active workers; Chapter 94 handles retirees. Membership in Chapter 94 is required if you want to receive the newsletter or enroll in our benefits.

Council 94, our sister and labor partner, represents active workers at the bargaining table, grievance hearings, and arbitrations. About 25 state locals and 49 municipal locals make up Council 94. We are fortunate to share office and meeting space with Council 94 but we have our own staff, an office manager, and our own governance.

Chapter 94 membership includes former active workers from both state and municipal locals. Since retirees no longer have access to collective bargaining, the Chapter's efforts are focused on the General Assembly and city and town councils to win legislation to protect our retirement.

We know members have endured some lean years since state COLAs were suspended, causing hardships for many. When you call us, we hear your outrage and frustration over the lingering effects of "pension reform." Mitigating this setback is why we hired a lobbying firm to advance our interests at the State House. We heard you and have made COLA restoration a top priority.

If you reach voicemail when you call the Chapter office or either Vice President, please leave your name and number. We can't return anonymous calls or answer questions when members fail to identify themselves or leave a callback number. Please be considerate and respectful when you call. Thank you for your cooperation.

Under the Forms link on the ERSRI webpage, retirees can find beneficiary change forms for their pension and the private insurer, The Hartford. Some documents require a notary's signature and can be returned by mail at ERSRI, 50 Service Rd, Warwick, RI 02886.

The litigation against the West Warwick Schools is progressing. Our legal team has finished taking statements and dispositions. The School Department eliminated retiree spousal health care. We are fighting this in court. We will renew our conversations with the Coventry Police. As of today, there are no updates. **RM**

A Day in the Life, Linda Folcarelli

I'm Linda Folcarelli, the current Chapter 94 Retirees Treasurer and Executive Board member. When I'm not handling the finances for our Chapter, I serve on the Johnston Town Council, District 1. This is my second term. I am one of five members of the Council.

The Town Council meets on the second Tuesday of every month, and I don't miss a meeting. Not being present does not serve my constituents at all.

Town Council members receive a meeting agenda every Friday, so we can be prepared to discuss and vote on agenda items. Council meetings start at 7 pm at the Johnston Town Hall.

I plan my vacations and free time around Town Council meetings. I've been known to take a quick trip to visit friends or family, but I make sure I'm back, ready, and informed to discuss Town Council business. And when I'm on vacation, I keep the cell phone handy. I could be on a beach, on a picnic, taking a hike, or paddling a kayak, yet the cell phone goes with me everywhere. I don't want to miss calls from constituents.

I know every street in my District. I should know them; I've walked the District for two election cycles. With many homes equipped with Ring or other video doorbells, residents can check who is at the door and choose not to answer it. Before video doorbells, it was

easier to engage with voters. Video doorbells seem to reduce the effectiveness of traditional door-knocking.

I worked for the State Department of Corrections before my retirement. I'm the only Town Council member who is retired. And that gives me time to talk to constituents. I can easily spend the entire day conversing with people in my district. Often, I hear complaints, which I try to troubleshoot as quickly as possible.

Smartphones have made it easier to do my job, I take photos to document issues and send them to the Department of Public Works with a request to fix the problem. And, of course, I follow up.

Being retired allows me to attend daytime Town functions, whether they're at the Town Hall, the Senior Center, or the Library. I regularly visit senior housing in my district and will often join participants at the Senior Center for lunch or play a spot of Bingo. I'm there to talk to residents about their needs.

In my "spare time", I head the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary. But, I am not complaining. Service on behalf of others is part of my DNA. I can't imagine a life without wanting to help others. **LF**

Change to Meeting Cancellation Policy

In the age of Zoom and virtual meetings, the Executive Board has voted to change the meeting cancellation policy. No longer will weather related events trigger meeting cancellations. Since we have the capacity to meet virtually on Zoom, our meetings will run as scheduled. Members can participate from the comfort and warmth of their homes using their smartphones, laptops, tablets, or desktop computers.

We encourage all to sign up to join the Zoom list by contacting our tech guru Ron Pepin, State VP. You will to receive log-in instructions for the Executive Board and general membership meetings.