

# APERSpective

RETIRED MEMBERS

Summer 2020

## APERS Director's Update



*Executive Director Duncan Baird*

next session in 2021. Many of the ideas under discussion were the same topics raised at the town halls held by the legislature's joint retirement committee last fall. The feedback received from active and retired members at those town halls will be very helpful in guiding their decisions. To read more on the latest Board meeting, see the article on page 3.

As the Board works to strengthen the retirement plan, the agency continues to fulfill our mission today. June

***"...whether in the office or off site, we are all working to serve our members in a seamless manner."***

The global pandemic has presented a new challenge to every individual and organization, including APERS and our membership. I'm proud of the effort our team at APERS has made during this crisis as we've moved quickly to adapt to serving our members in these times.

Over the last few weeks, most of our staff has been working remotely. But whether in the office or off site, we are all working to serve our members in a seamless manner while also helping prevent the spread of the virus in our office and the community.

We've recently held the regular quarterly meeting of the APERS Board of Trustees. The meeting was conducted remotely via the Zoom web conferencing platform. The trustees and those making presentations were able to participate remotely. Our members, the public, and the press were all able to observe the meeting and see the handouts from the comfort of their own homes and offices.

At their recent meetings, the trustees have been discussing potential items to include in a legislative package for the

1st marked the third successful "payday" for retirement benefits since the majority of APERS' staff began working remotely. During this time, we've answered hundreds of calls and emails from members, continued providing retirement estimates and counseling, and processed our normal volume of retirement applications.

Understandably, we've changed some of our processes. For example, when a member calls for an appointment, we schedule a telephone counseling session. A counselor then prepares a benefit estimate and mails it to the member. Then at the scheduled time, the counselor calls the member to go over the estimate and answer any questions. So far, our members have adapted well to this new process, and we really appreciate it.

In striving to meet the current challenges, we've had one major advantage -- our new online pension administration *(continued on page 3)*

[www.apers.org](http://www.apers.org)

# Member Self Service Portal (MSS)

At this time while APERS offices are closed to the public, the Member Self Service Portal is the tool for you. You can perform many of the most common tasks yourself, such as change your electronic funds transfer account, send a secure message, change your address, change your name or marital status, get a duplicate 1099R, or change your tax withholding.

The Member Self Service portal is located on our website at [www.apers.org](http://www.apers.org). If you have not already registered as a user, we strongly recommend you do it now. Below is a quick start up guide for setting up your account. If you have questions or need help getting on the portal, give APERS a call, we will be glad to help.

## Setting up your access to the Member Self Service Portal (MSS)

APERS' **Member Self Service Portal (MSS)** is your first and best way to review your retirement related information, look over your monthly Explanation of Benefits statements, send secure messages to APERS staff and much, much more. But before you can do any of these things you have to establish a personal secure login.

The process begins online at [www.apers.org](http://www.apers.org). At the top of the page click on the [MEMBERS](#) link.

LOGIN: [MEMBERS](#) [EMPLOYERS](#) [PARTNERS](#)

On the login screen, click on [Register](#). This will start the account wizard and you can follow the steps to

- Verify you are a member of the system
- Create a user name and password
- Set up your security questions and answers

Once you've completed the set up, you will get a confirmation email, and you are ready to log in.

## Account Inactive? What to Do

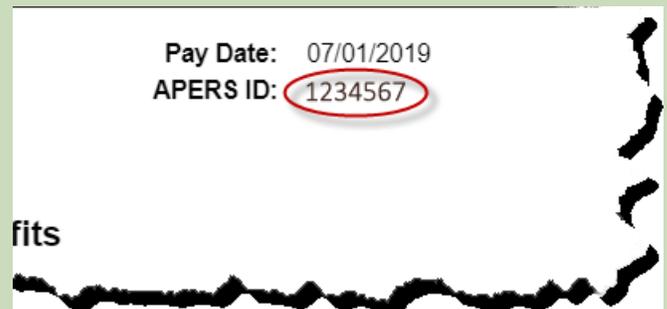
Members who only occasionally access their MSS accounts may find themselves locked out with their accounts "inactive." Although frustrating, this is a necessary security measure. You must log into your account at least once every 12 months, or it will automatically become locked.

Your APERS account contains critical personal information -- how much you earn, how long you work, birth date, marital status, and maybe even your direct deposit accounts if you are receiving payments. If someone pretending to be you got access to your account, you could suffer some real harm.

As a result, we follow the same very strict security protocols you will find at places like banks. So if you find yourself locked out, just give us a call, and we'll get you going again in no time.

## A Closer Look

As part of the verification process the system will ask for your APERS ID. "Where can I find my APERS ID?" is a common question our members ask. Your APERS ID can be found on any of your monthly Explanation of Benefits letters. Your APERS ID is found just below the pay date.



If you don't have your APERS ID handy, you can contact APERS and we will be glad to assist you.

For a step by step guide to creating an account on the Members Self Service Portal go to our website at:

[www.apers.org/myguides](http://www.apers.org/myguides)

# APERS Quarterly Board Meetings

The APERS Board of Trustees meets on a quarterly basis to fulfill its administrative duties and responsibilities to the system. These duties including monitoring the performance of the system's investments, reviewing the annual valuation, and working to maintain a strong funding status for the system.

Like many of us, the Board continues to work through the pandemic. The board met via Zoom video conference for the regularly scheduled May quarterly meeting as well as for a special board meeting in June. The Board is preparing and discussing items that could be considered for the 2021 Legislative Session. Another special board meeting has been scheduled for July to continue this discussion.

Under discussion are potential changes that would help keep the System strong and healthy in the years to come. These changes are based on research and assistance provided by the system's actuarial consultant over the last few years, as well as input received from members and retirees at legislative town hall meetings. Some of the items currently being considered are:

- A phased increase in the member contribution rate, which is currently 5%,
- An increase in the number of years used in the calculation of Final Average Compensation (FAC), from the current 3 years,
- An increase in the vesting period, from the current 5 years,
- For new and possibly non-vested members, an alignment of the cost of living adjustment (COLA) when they retire to the lower of 3% or the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The Board reached out to the Association of Arkansas Counties, the Arkansas Municipal League, and the Arkansas State Employee Association, for their feedback

## Retirees to Receive COLA

If you are a retiree or beneficiary receiving an APERS retirement benefit for at least 12 months on June 30, 2020 (i.e. your effective retirement date was on or before July 1, 2019), you will receive an increase of three percent to your benefit based on the previous July's benefit amount. This increase will also be applied to DROP participants if their DROP service began on or before July 1, 2019.

on these important issues. Representatives of these groups spoke to the Board in June, and their written responses can be found in the June meeting materials on the APERS website (<https://www.apers.org/apers-board>).

It is important to remember that the benefit provisions have changed over the years, and all the measures currently under discussion have been employed by the system previously. Some of the provisions being discussed were in use for much longer than the current policies have been in place.

As an example of how things have evolved over time: employee contributions for the original contributory plan were 6% for many years; the original FAC was a 5-year average (and a 4-year average has been used at times); a 10-year vesting requirement was the rule until the late 1990's; and the COLA was tied to the CPI for most of the life of the system.

Each of the items being considered are generally in line with previous practices at APERS and are comparable to the practices of other successful systems. APERS would maintain a strong benefit package with any combination of proposals currently being considered.

Any changes enacted would balance the need to keep a strong retirement benefit for public employees and help public employers attract and retain a great workforce, with the goal of maintaining the financial strength of the plan into the future.



@ArkansasPERS

## APERS Director's Update

*(continued from page 1)*

system (COMPASS). Since it became fully operational in 2017, it has greatly enhanced our efficiency and flexibility. Your member's portal (MSS) can do the same for you. It will allow you to manage your own account and do many routine tasks for yourself. See the other articles about it here for more information and instructions on setting up your account.

As always, our first concern is the safety and welfare of our members and our staff. We hope all our members and the community at large remain safe and healthy. We will continue to keep our membership informed, both here and on Facebook and Twitter as things progress.



**THANK YOU**, APERS fans on Facebook! Our page just reached a modest milestone - 2,000 page likes - from active members, retirees, leaders, legislators, and others. It is a privilege to communicate with you online, and we appreciate your presence!

 [www.facebook.com/Arkansas.PERS/](http://www.facebook.com/Arkansas.PERS/)

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## Direct Deposit Dates 2020

Deposits are made on the first work day of each month. If the first falls on a holiday or weekend, deposits are made the next official work day.

- **Monday, August 3**
- **Tuesday, September 1**
- **Thursday, October 1**
- **Monday, November 2**
- **Tuesday, December 1**

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### **APERS EXECUTIVE STAFF**

Duncan Baird  
*Executive Director*

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