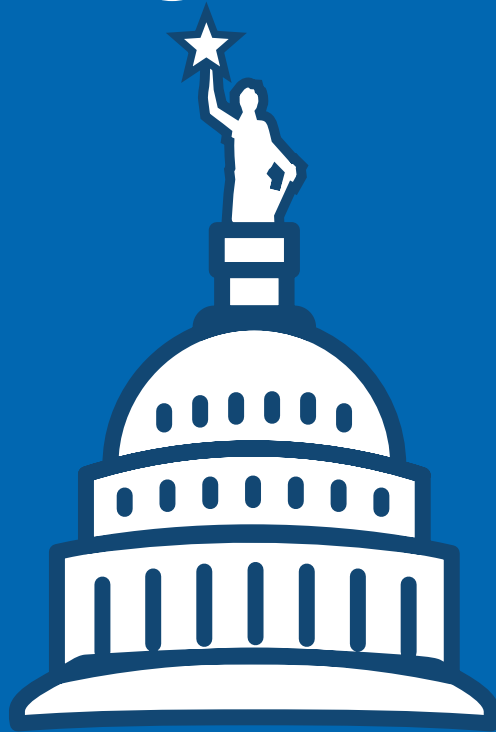


TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

SUPPORT TEXAS EDUCATION RETIREES

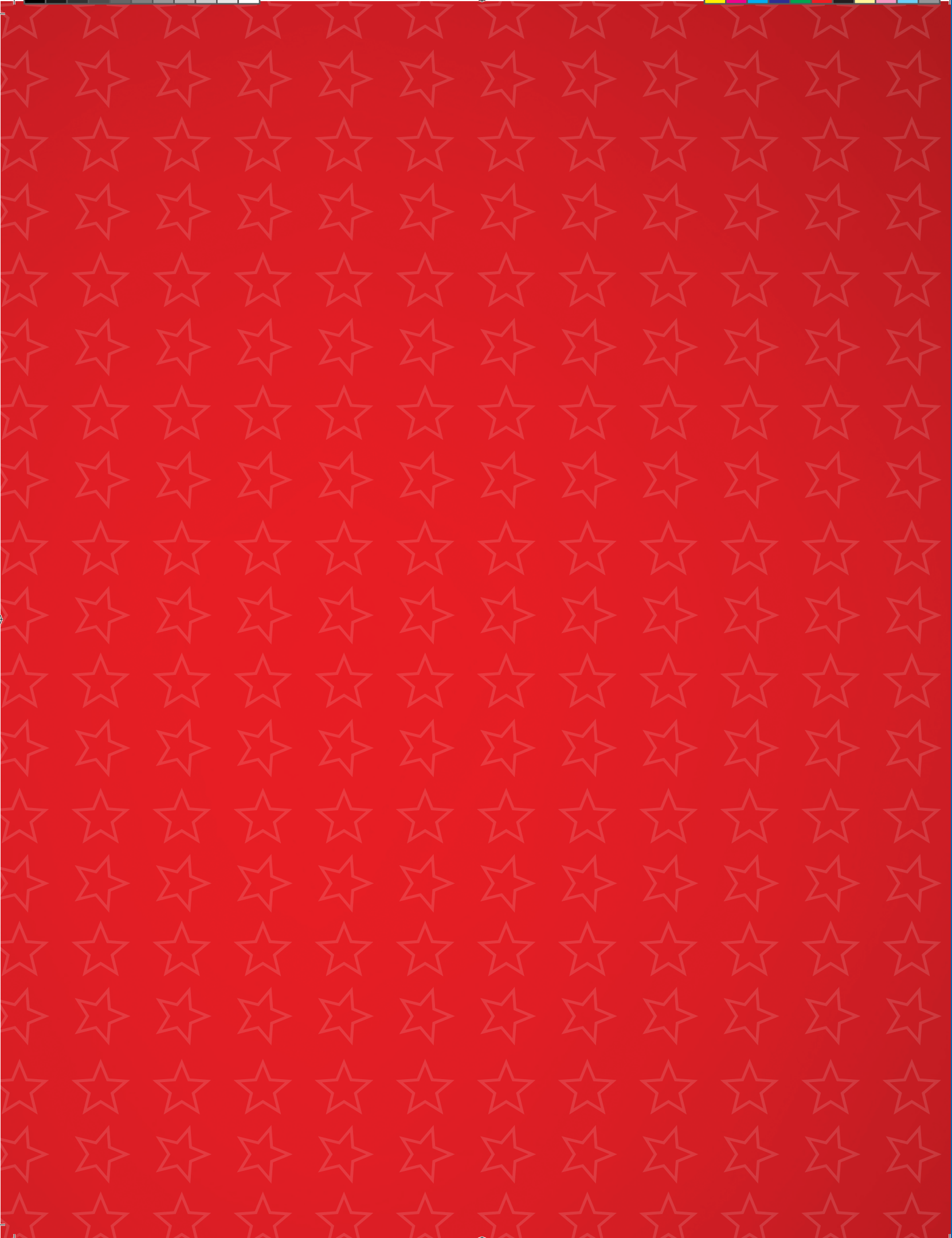


ZOOM TO THE CAPITOL!



APRIL 5-8, 2021





SPECIAL EDITION

**TRTA ZOOMS TO THE
CAPITOL APRIL 5-8!
RSVP TODAY!**



TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS FOUNDATION
**TRTF Launches Special Virtual
Fundraising Campaign**

Donate Your Date



The VOICE

THE OFFICIAL NEWS BULLETIN OF THE TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

87TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION OVERVIEW

SENDING A SEA OF RED TO THE TEXAS CAPITOL: TRTA RED LETTER CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY!



By Tim Lee
Executive Director

Welcome to this very special issue of *The VOICE*! In this issue is an advocacy toolkit unlike ANYTHING we have EVER done before. Since these are unprecedented times, we are pursuing unprecedented actions!

The Texas Retired Teachers Association (TRTA) is asking every member who receives this packet to join our Red Letter Campaign! All you have to do to participate is write your letters on the stationery provided and send them to your elected officials (envelopes included)!

The **TRTA Red Letter Campaign** is a challenge to our entire membership to send our urgent priorities for public education retirees to all state Senators and Representatives. Use this unique opportunity to tell your story, talk about what matters most to you, and ask for the Legislature's help this session!

"My hope," says TRTA State President Leroy DeHaven, "is that every TRTA member will send these letters back to Austin. When I see my Representative at the grocery store, I want him to remember the year retired teachers may not have walked the halls of the Capitol, but made a strong, positive impact with our **red letters**!"

Nothing is more important right now than our members reaching out to their legislators! Our **TRTA Red Letter Campaign** is underway, and we want ALL members to participate. It's time to tell your story!

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



TRTA RED LETTER CAMPAIGN IS UNDERWAY! WRITE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR TODAY!

Join TRTA as We ZOOM to the Capitol!

Beginning Monday, April 5, 2021, TRTA members will **ZOOM** to the Texas Capitol—virtually—to promote improved benefits for all Texas retired school personnel! In previous legislative sessions, TRTA has hosted an in-person event on the east lawn of the Capitol in April, while thousands of TRTA members roamed the halls visiting with their state Senators and Representatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our method this year, but not our passion and goal to represent you! We know our members have not been able to gather in person for nearly a year, but TRTA will make Zoom to the Capitol an engaging, inclusive event that ALL members can participate in!

How to Participate During TRTA Zoom to the Capitol

1. RSVP to Zoom to the Capitol by visiting this link: www.trta.org/dac2021
 - a. Your RSVP ensures you will receive the Zoom meeting links for all live TRTA events being hosted during the week of April 5 and any virtual advocacy materials you may need!
 - You will need an email address to participate in the live Zoom events. All events will be recorded, posted on the TRTA website, and may be viewed at a later time if you miss a live event.
 - Your RSVP also ensures we procure the correct Zoom license so that as many TRTA members as possible can participate!
2. Let's send a sea of red to the Texas Capitol with **TRTA's Red Letter Campaign!**
 - a. Send a handwritten letter to your State Senator and Representative! Included in this packet are two sheets of paper (see pages 7-10) and two red envelopes you may use to write and mail two letters: one for your state Senator and one for your state Representative.
 - b. Write your letters on the enclosed sheets of paper.

WHAT TO WRITE IN YOUR LETTER:

- Thank your legislator for including funding for TRS and TRS-Care in the base budget bill, Senate Bill 1. Thank them for filing the TRS Sunset bill to pass legislation to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of TRS as recommended by the Texas Sunset Commission.
 - Tell them you need their support to ensure the funding included in the base budget bill is passed! You need their vote to ensure the longevity of the TRS pension fund and make it possible for Texas public education retirees to receive a COLA. You need their vote to support significant changes to TRS that will improve the experience for all TRS members.
 - **TELL YOUR STORY!** Tell them how these issues are impacting you personally; for example, how a COLA would impact your financial planning and security, the last time you received a raise, etc. How it would change your life!
 - If you use TRS-Care, tell them how important it is that your premiums remain stable and your benefits are not slashed.
- c. Insert your letters into the proper envelopes (one is for your Senator and one is for your Representative). Be careful to insert the correct letter into the appropriate envelope. Write your Senator's name on the envelope addressed to the Senate. Write your Representative's name on the envelope addressed to the House.
 1. **HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE: Add their name**
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910
 2. **SENATOR: Add their name**
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711-2068
 - d. Include a stamp on each envelope and **put them in the mail the week of March 29** so that your letter arrives in time for TRTA Zoom to the Capitol!
 - e. Not sure who your state legislators are? The names of your Senator and Representative can be found on the back cover page of this packet. If you cannot find these names on your packet, please look up your legislators using TRTA's online directory at www.trta.org/legislators. Be sure to send to your STATE legislators (not your federal legislators in Washington, D.C.)

TRTA RED LETTER CAMPAIGN IS UNDERWAY! WRITE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR TODAY!

- f. **SPECIAL CONTEST ALERT:** Snap a photo of your envelopes as you're putting them in the mail and post it to the TRTA app or on Facebook with the hashtag **#TRTARedLetterDay**. All members who participate via the TRTA app will be entered in a prize drawing to receive TRTA branded merchandise. See number 5 for more information.
 - g. We encourage all members who use social media to use **#SupportTexasEducationRetirees** on all of their posts during Zoom to the Capitol week.
3. Participate in a Zoom meeting or conference call with your legislators already scheduled by a local unit.
 - a. Your local unit may have set up a meeting for the week of April 5 with your legislators already. Contact your local unit President or Legislative Chair to find out. Check out the TRTA local unit directory for contact information for local officers (www.trta.org/districts-and-local-units). If you are not assigned to a local unit, find one using our local unit map at www.trta.org/local-unit-map.
 - b. Be sure to wear your enclosed TRTA sticker and use the cover of *The VOICE* as a flyer to wave during your virtual Zoom meeting.
 4. Be sure to sign up for TRTA's email newsletter, the *Inside Line*, for urgent calls to action that may require you to email or call your legislator! Sign up here: www.trta.org/the-inside-line.
 5. Download the TRTA mobile app to receive legislative and event updates, connect with other retirees, share your experience, and participate in trivia contests and prize drawings. Learn more at www.trta.org/trta-app.
 6. Consider making a donation to the Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF) to honor a special date or person in your life for their Donate Your Date campaign! See page 11 for more details. Help us uphold the tradition of giving to important charitable causes for retired and active educators through TRTF virtually this year! 📧

ZOOM TO THE CAPITOL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

| MONDAY, APRIL 5, 2021 | TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2021 | WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2021 | THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2021 |
|--|--|---|---|
| TRTA RED LETTER CAMPAIGN – LETTER DELIVERY ALL WEEK LONG (GET YOUR LETTERS IN THE MAIL THE WEEK OF MARCH 29 SO THAT THEY ARRIVE ON TIME)! | | | |
| All day available for virtual legislative office visits | 9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. Zoom to the Capitol Kickoff Event (held live via Zoom) Day available for virtual legislative office visits 5:00 p.m. Program with Special Legislative Guest (event will be held live via Zoom and aired simultaneously on TRTA's Facebook page) | Morning available for virtual legislative office visits 10:30 a.m. Virtual House & Senate Gallery Visit (TBD) (TRTA will air live readings of the Texas House and Senate resolutions honoring Texas retired educators) 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Wrap-Up Rally and TRTF Bring Your Own Lunch/Donate Your Date Fundraiser Event All afternoon available for virtual legislative office visits | All day available for virtual legislative office visits |

Meeting with your legislators is of utmost importance during TRTA's Zoom to the Capitol event. Districts and local units should prioritize setting meetings with their Senators and Representatives throughout the week of April 5. While TRTA will have a robust schedule filled with interesting sessions, they will be recorded and accessible online after airing live.

We ask that our members **continue the tradition of wearing red** during TRTA Zoom to the Capitol and to please wear the sticker enclosed in your packet when you meet virtually with your legislators. You can also use the cover of *The VOICE* as a flyer to send a friendly TRTA wave to your legislators. Don't forget to RSVP at www.trta.org/dac2021.

SESSION IS OFF TO A GREAT START, BUT WE CANNOT REST NOW!

The 87th Legislative Session started off in a very positive direction for our retirees this year, with the Texas Sunset Commission meeting on January 13 and adopting ALL of TRTA's recommended statutory changes to improve TRS agency functions and operations!

The TRS Sunset bill includes several important items! These include requiring TRS to:

- respond to member health care issues in a timely fashion,
- publish information about staff bonuses tied to fund performance in the agency CAFR,
- appoint an ombudsman representing TRS members,
- and address the penalty structure for retirees who return to work.

The TRS Sunset bill is a HUGE win for Texas public education retirees! TRTA and its members have been pivotal during the sunset process, providing valuable insights into retirees' concerns that will now be addressed. We have seen the sunset process working in real time and believe these changes will provide a better experience overall for TRS members.

However, sunset issues are not the only item on TRTA's robust agenda! Our legislative priorities can be found on pages 8 and 10 or online here www.trta.org/priorities.

TRTA has a lot of work to do this session, and a pandemic isn't going to slow us down!

TRTA is working actively to find ways to provide a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for our retirees.

TRTA also received the news on January 18 that both the Senate and House versions of the state budget propose the funding needed to ensure the pension fund remains on the path to actuarial soundness and that TRS-Care participants do not face premium increases or cuts in benefits.

The budget will go through multiple changes throughout session, and **TRTA must remain vigilant to ensure these dire budget needs are met!** We are encouraged, but we cannot let our guard down!

It is more important than ever that our members get involved and communicate with their legislators!

Please write your letter to your Senator and Representative today! Instructions can be found on page 4.



SUPPORT TEXAS EDUCATION RETIREES!



TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



TRTA Member Contact Information

Name

Address, City, State and Zip Code

Dear Senator

Name

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

Sincerely, TRTA Member

Signature





2021

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

STATE ISSUES

★ TRS Pension Fund

ACTION ITEM: Preserve the funding plan enacted during the 86th Legislature (SB 12)

- Keep the TRS pension fund on the path to actuarial soundness
- Ensure SB 12 phase-in plan raising contribution rates to 8% for state/educators, and 1.8% for ISDs by 2022
- The Legislature should require all employers including higher education to contribute the full employer contribution amounts including salaries below the statutory minimum

ACTION ITEM: Secure a financial structure capable of providing a future COLA

- Average TRS monthly annuity is \$2,096
- Half of all TRS annuitants receive less than \$1,800 per month
- Members retiring during the last 16 years have never had a permanent increase in their annuity

★ TRS-Care

ACTION ITEM: Maintain contribution for TRS-Care retiree health insurance

- Vulnerability to COVID-19 necessitates affordable, easy access to doctors and care
- Avoid increased premiums and cuts in services or benefits
- Study and design long-term funding structure. Funding per TRS retiree should be equal to the Employees Retirement System (ERS) funding per retiree
- Allow one-time re-enrollment to TRS-Care

★ Sunset Review

ACTION ITEM: Adopt TRS Sunset Staff Report and additional TRTA recommendations

- Promote a member-focused and friendly culture at TRS
- Direct TRS to designate an FTE position as a TRS member ombudsman focused on the needs and issues of TRS members, including the impact of COVID-19
- Direct TRS to simplify and clearly define reasonable rules for return-to-work and part-time employees
- Create appeals process for disallowed health care claims

FEDERAL ISSUES

★ Social Security

ACTION ITEM: Ensure earned Social Security benefits are paid to retirees

- Reform WEP and GPO current formulas that unfairly penalize Texas retired educators
- Retirees' traditional supplemental income has been impacted by the pandemic (substitute teaching, bus driving)
- Prevent mandatory Social Security as a resolution to the inequity of WEP and GPO

313 E. 12th Street, Suite 200 | Austin, TX 78701 | 1.800.880.1650 | www.trta.org

TRTA 
The Voice For All Public Education Retirees





TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



TRTA Member Contact Information

Name

Address, City, State and Zip Code

Dear Representative

Name

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2021

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TRTA
The Voice For All Public Education Retirees



Donate Your Date

TRTF Fundraiser “Donate Your Date” To Launch in March!

This year is sure to present the Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF) with unique challenges. As our retirees continue to deal with the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for financial assistance continues to grow. Many retirees who supplemented their income with substitute teaching either lost those jobs or had to make the tough choice to stay home due to health concerns.



This also marks the first year in TRTA's new two-year cycle that there will not be an annual convention. In years past, TRTF hosted a breakfast or luncheon to raise funds for its many charitable programs during the convention. This year, TRTF had planned to do something similar for TRTA's Zoom to the Capitol event; however, the event will now be held virtually instead of in person.

The question for the TRTF Board of Trustees is, “How do we continue to provide support for retirees in need and fund our much-needed scholarship and grant programs for active teachers while ensuring the health and safety of TRTA members is prioritized?”

TRTA Executive Director Tim Lee had the perfect solution: **DONATE YOUR DATE!** Any TRTA members who know Tim Lee personally know his heart is as big as Texas! This idea is easy for our members and effective for our virtual fundraising event, not to mention FUN!

The idea is to donate an amount of money based on a date that is meaningful to you. For example, Tim Lee started working for TRTA in 2004. He wants to donate \$200.40 to TRTF to honor this important milestone in his life! Other great examples include donating based on a wedding anniversary, a child or grandchild's birthday, or even the day you retired or joined TRTA!

Is your wedding anniversary on February 14? Consider donating \$2.14, \$21.40, or \$214! Maybe someone you love received the great news they beat cancer on June 8, 2014 and you'd like to honor them by giving \$68.14! Any amount will be a tremendous help to TRTF as we strive to fund our important programs, like “A Helping Hand,” the Disaster Relief Fund, the TRTF Tutor Program, and more!

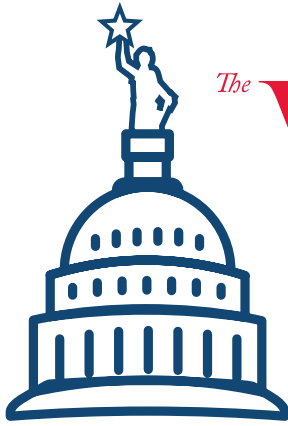
When you Donate Your Date, you can also let us know why this day is special for you by submitting a message with your donation.

How to Donate Your Date! (Effective March 22, 2021)

Make a donation online at www.trtf.org/donateyourdate and email your story to help@trtf.org (feel free to include a photo or short video) or visit www.trtf.org/donateyourdate and download the special donation form and mail to TRTF, Attn: Donate Your Date, 313 E. 12th Street, Suite 220, Austin, TX 78701.

TRTF will share Donate Your Date stories on the TRTA Facebook page and app throughout the spring and until the campaign ends in June 2021.

TRTF will host a virtual bring-your-own-lunch/Donate Your Date fundraiser event on April 7, 2021, and we invite members to join us live on Zoom. All persons who RSVP to TRTA's Zoom to the Capitol event (see page 4 in *The VOICE*) will receive the unique Zoom link in their email the week of March 29.



The VOICE

Send address changes to:
Texas Retired Teachers Association
313 E. 12th Street, Suite 200 | Austin, TX 78701-1957
1.800.880.1650 | www.trta.org

The legislators listed below coincide with the mailing address TRTA has on file for you.
If you have moved recently, you may verify your legislators at www.trta.org/legislators.