



TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

TRTA: The Voice For All Public Education Retirees

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

RESOURCE GUIDE 2019-2020



All documents in this guide are available online
www.trta.org/legcomm

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) Pension Trust Fund:

- Ensure that TRS is managed by sound actuarial principles. To accomplish this, increase the pension fund's state/employer contribution rates so that the pension fund will be within a 31 year funding period.
 - TRTA recommends that the state contribution be increased from 6.8% to 8.6% and that participating Social Security employers be required to pay the 1.5% employer contribution to TRS.
 - Recommend that TRTA and the Legislature explore viable options for providing either a thirteenth check or a cost-of-living adjustment.

TRS-CARE:

- Provide affordable healthcare for retirees by increasing the base funding for TRS-Care.
 - Recommend increasing the current employer (state and school district) contribution from 2% to 3% for 2020-2021 and increasing that percentage by .25% for the next eight years until the total percentage reaches 5%.
- Allow Medicare-eligible retirees who opted out of TRS-Care a one-time opportunity to rejoin TRS-Care. This "golden ticket" will apply to retirees who left the plan between January 1, 2018, through January 1, 2020, to expire December 31, 2023.

#RAISETHEBASE

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE TRAINING SESSION

Teamwork, Commitment, Time

Note: The Legislative Resource Guide is a resource for all of TRTA members to use. The District Legislative Chair will use the guide for training at the District's Spring Leadership Development Conference. The guide is online at www.trta.org.

Key sections are in bold (noted by page number in the guide).

Focal points:

- We want to be heard, seen and respected
- We are better together speaking as one voice.
- Attitude is everything and is crucial to our success.

Your Legislative Team Members are:

Austin: Tim Lee, Pat Macias, Bill Barnes, Vicki Truitt, Ronnie Jung, Cindee Sharp, Brock Gregg, Andrew Weber, Tonna Duke

Texas Retired Teachers Association Priorities:

- Protect the Teacher Retirement System Defined Benefit Plan (Raise base funding)
- Protect the Teacher Retirement System Insurance plan (TRS-Care) (Raise base funding)
- Support a pension annuity increase
- Support repeal of the federal provision of GPO/WEP (Social Security)

NOW TELL YOUR STORY

When visiting a local or state legislator's office, stay on message by asking the following questions.

- Will you support and raise the base funding for the Teacher Retirement System as a Defined Benefit plan?
- Will you support the Teacher Retirement System's TRS-Care insurance continuation and raising the base funding for this program?
- Will you support Texas Retired Teachers Association Priorities?

Thank the Legislator, leave and start planning for your next visit either at the state office or the local district office) **STAY IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION MODE!**

Legislative Committee member duties

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Communication

- Disseminate information from the State Office
- Establish a contact team (1-3 local members) for each Representative and Senator
- Establish a personal relationship with your Representative and Senator
- Receive information from local units and pass it on to District and State members
- Always be prepared to speak at local, district or state meetings
- Keep up to date and be informed. Use the *Inside Line*, *The VOICE*, TRTA Videos, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, newspapers, TV, and trta.org

TRTA and the Teacher Retirement System of Texas

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- Texas Constitution guarantees you will have a pension for life.
- Texas Constitution does not guarantee other benefits.

Defined Benefit vs. Defined Contribution

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KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Advocacy and Communication Tips

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Grassroots involvement—Golden Rules

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Visiting the Representative and Senators Key: Be Prepared, Be Positive, Be Brief, Be Courteous, Use Proper Protocol, and Show Gratitude

Other information: Calendar and Websites.

#RAISETHEBASE

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THE 2019-2020 LEGISLATIVE TEAM

The TRTA Legislative team:

In Austin

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • TRTA Legislative Coordinator/Chair | Tonna Duke |
| • TRTA President | Pat Macias |
| • TRTA Executive Director | Tim Lee |
| • TRTA Associate Directors | Brock Gregg, Cindee Sharp |
| • TRTA Retirement Consultant | Ronnie Jung |
| • TRTA Legislative Consultant | Bill Barnes |
| • TRTA Consultant | Andrew Weber |
| • TRTA Lobbyist | Vicki Truitt |

Around the State

- TRTA State Legislative Committee: 20 members
- TRTA District Legislative Chairs: 20 members
- TRTA Local Legislative Chairs: 254 members
- TRTA members: 94,000+ members

These member representatives are advocates for:

- TRS 1.5 million members (active and retired)
- TRS 390,000+ annuitants

TRTA's priorities are very important to us, and we want them to be very important to our legislators. Many activities are already underway. We want to be seen, heard and respected by our elected officials.

TRTA's focus will be on:

1. Providing adequate state funding for TRS defined benefit plan by increasing the state contributions.
2. Protecting the TRS-Care health insurance plan
3. Preserving the TRS defined benefit plan
4. Obtaining a pension annuity increase
5. Supporting repeal of the federal provisions GPO and WEP

The major effort will be on educating legislators and candidates about our issues. TRTA will need to get commitments from legislators before Legislative Session begins in January. **NOW** is the time to tell the story.

It is extremely important for all members to be active during the campaigns in the fall and spring. Get to know the candidates and their staff personally. **Stay on message by asking legislators to increase the state contribution to TRS. TELL THE STORY.**

LEGISLATIVE DUTIES

The TRTA Legislative Committee shall study pending legislation, develop and implement a plan to promote new legislation, and continuously inform members about related legislation. The committee shall collaborate with the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature, NRTA, other similar organizations, and with other education organizations concerning retirement issues. The committee shall collaborate with other standing and special committees as appropriate to further the mission of TRTA.

The link between the TRTA Legislative Coordinator, State Legislative Committee, and the District and Local Unit chairs must be maintained if the TRTA State Legislative Committee is to be effective.

Suggested Activities

The TRTA State Legislative Committee Chair:

1. Work with the TRTA Legislative Coordinator to establish the TRTA legislative priorities requested from the local units;
2. Act as a consultant to the district legislative committee chair in relaying the legislative concerns at the legislative training session at the Spring Leadership Development Conference; and
3. Disseminate information to the district and local unit legislative chairs.

The TRTA District Legislative Committee Chairs:

1. Disseminate information from the TRTA Legislative Committee to the local legislative committee chairs;
2. Receive information from the local unit legislative committee chairs to send to the TRTA Legislative Committee and the TRTA Legislative Coordinator;
3. Serve as presenter of the legislative committee training for local unit legislative committee chairs at the Spring Leadership Development Conference;
4. Work with local units to maintain communication and personal contact with Texas and U.S. Senators and Representatives;
5. Be aware of legislative needs and elections in the district and disseminate this information to the state legislative committee and legislative coordinator;
6. Make all local unit legislative committee chairs and district members aware of the TRTA legislative priorities and report legislative updates;
7. Chair the district legislative task force committee composed of the local unit legislative committee chairs or a local unit member from each local unit in the district; and
8. Attend the TRTA Convention legislative training session.

The TRTA Local Unit Legislative Committee Chairs:

1. Relay to members information received from TRTA and the district legislative committee chairs;
2. Organize a local contact team (one to three members) for each local Texas Senator and Representative and U.S. Congressman representing your area to relay TRTA legislative priorities and concerns;
3. Gather legislative information of local interest and make a legislative report at each meeting;
4. Set up a network for quick communication among members;
5. Check TRTA website for legislative updates and give to the technology contact(s) in each local unit in order that a link to the legislative update can be on every local unit web page;
6. Survey members to determine legislative priorities to assist the TRTA legislative committee;
7. Sign up for the *Inside Line* at trta.org/the-inside-line;
8. Set up a group email listing for local units; and
9. Attend the legislative training session at the Spring Leadership Development Conference and if possible attend the legislative training session at the TRTA Convention.

TRTA AND THE TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF TEXAS

THE TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF TEXAS

The Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) was established through a constitutional amendment passed in 1936. The enabling legislation was enacted the following year. TRS was created to provide a retirement program for persons employed in public education, including professional and business administration, supervision and instruction. Membership was extended to auxiliary employees in 1949; and in 1977, all distinctions between teacher and auxiliary employees were removed.



Article 16, Section 67 of the Texas Constitution and state statute 821.006 provide that the state contribution may not be less than six percent and not more than ten percent of the aggregate (total payroll) pay of active school personnel. The statute also provides that members' contributions may not be less than six percent of their salaries. The Constitution additionally requires that the financing of benefits must be based on sound actuarial principles (actuarial soundness), and that the assets are held in trust for the benefit of the members and may not be diverted. Actuarial soundness means that the TRS pension fund must be able to pay the benefits for all present and future retirees within a 31-year period. Usually in the month of February, an actuarial evaluation is due from TRS to the Texas Legislature to validate the fund's actuarial soundness. If on that date the fund is ruled to be actuarially sound, then a benefit increase may be paid to retirees. The Legislature must pass a bill authorizing for this benefit increase.

In July 2018, The TRS board of Directors voted to lower the assumed rate of return of the pension fund from 8% to 7.25%, thus increasing the unfunded liability of the pension fund. With this decrease, actuarial soundness is not predicted to be reached for 86 years without an increase in the state contribution to the fund.

TRS represents financial stability and security for more than 1,000,000 active members and more than 390,000 retirees and beneficiaries. TRS is inherently a political institution. The system was born out of political action and submitted to the voters for the approval as an amendment to the Texas Constitution. Consequently, all benefit improvements granted to the members must be approved through legislative action.

TRTA LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION

The constitutional and statutory duties of the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) Board of Trustees and the management staff are to administer the retirement system and invest the retirement funds. Advocating for influencing legislation by the TRS Board of Trustees or management staff for changes or annuity increases is prohibited.

The Texas Retired Teachers Association (TRTA) believes it is the responsibility of the TRS Board of Trustees and management staff to provide accurate and timely information to active and retired TRS members. TRS members need this information to develop improvements for active and retired members. TRTA is recognized as the organization responsible for advocating and working for benefit improvements for retired members of TRS. TRTA is the organization that works exclusively for retired public school and higher education employees. TRTA has been involved actively in proposing, monitoring, and supporting legislation benefiting retired and active public school employees since its formation in 1953.

All of our annuity increases have been ad hoc benefits (pension and health care), requiring repeated requests during each legislative session. We have enjoyed very good support from our legislators, and we certainly appreciate them understanding our concerns. Benefit increases granted by TRS require legislative action and approval; therefore, we must remain alert and involved in the legislative process. We have a responsibility to become knowledgeable about our legislative priorities and proposals. It is also our responsibility to communicate our legislative priorities and proposals to the Legislature, other educational organizations, and our membership.

The retired and active members of TRS must be prepared and ready to become involved in support of legislative proposals affecting the welfare of the system. All local retired teacher association (RTA) units must have in operation a procedure for distribution of legislative updates to their members. It is the responsibility of the President of the local unit to appoint a legislative chair who will be active and keep the membership fully informed about legislative matters. The local unit should have a telephone committee, and if possible, an email list in operation for instant contact with legislators.

In large metropolitan areas, where the membership resides within several legislative districts, legislative committee members may be designated to contact legislators in the district where they live. TRTA's responsibility is to contact legislators, attend hearings to express our concerns and positions on legislative proposals, and request their support. The individual members of TRTA who live in the legislative district throughout the state can vote for these legislators; therefore, they must contact their Representatives and Senators and ask for their votes and support of legislative proposals. Many times, it will be a key staff person you will talk to when your legislator is not available. They are very helpful and usually can answer most of your questions. Treat them with respect and courtesy and express your appreciation for their help. To be effective with your legislator, good rapport with his or her staff is essential.



DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

Defined Benefit vs. Defined Contribution

Do you know the difference between a defined benefit retirement plan and a defined contribution plan? Public school personnel in Texas participate in a defined benefit (DB) program. The DB plan is very important for members of the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS), as our annuities are guaranteed for life by the Texas Constitution. Our annuities are determined by number of years of service, age at retirement, highest salary and a 2.3 multiplier. The state of Texas is required to contribute a minimum of 6% and a maximum of 10% of the active aggregate teacher payroll to the pension fund (the state contribution is 6.8% for 2017). Active employees now pay 7.7% of their salaries into the fund, an amount that increased gradually from 6.4% in 2014. TRS manages the plan, invests the funds and pays out benefits to annuitants monthly.

There are groups that want to eliminate defined benefit programs and replace them with defined contribution (DC) plans. DC plans require individuals to make investment and contribution decisions. Unlike DB plans, they are portable from job to job; however, this encourages job transition that is very costly for the workforce, especially public education. The employee must ride the ups and downs of the market. This shifts the responsibility onto retirees, who can outlive the benefits they receive or be faced with unpredictable retirement income. In contrast, the DB plan assures a lifetime annuity. It is especially important for TRS to remain a defined benefit program as most Texas public school districts are not coordinated with Social Security, and TRS serves as their only form of retirement security.

DB vs. DC: Highlights

	<u>DB</u>	<u>DC</u>
Guaranteed for life	Yes	No
Managed by TRS investment professionals	Yes	No
Selling point for recruiting and retaining teachers	Yes	No
Generates a predictable, steady retirement income	Yes	No
Sole guaranteed income for most Texas retirees	Yes	No
Allows retirement on predetermined and predictable formula	Yes	No
Rewards years of service and job stability	Yes	No
Provides secure disability and survivor benefits based on the individual's years of service and established formula	Yes	No

DEFINED BENEFIT VS. DEFINED CONTRIBUTION

What is a Defined Benefit Plan?	What is a Defined Contribution Plan?
<p>A DEFINED BENEFIT PLAN (DB) is a pension plan in which an employer promises a specified monthly benefit on retirement that is predetermined by a formula. It is not solely based on investment returns.</p>	<p>A DEFINED CONTRIBUTION PLAN (DC) PLAN, such as a 401(k), is a pension plan in which the employee is only guaranteed the balance in the account at the time of retirement. This may fluctuate significantly due to the investment earnings and employers varying contributions depending upon the economy.</p>

Properties of a Defined Benefit Plan	Properties of a Defined Contribution Plan
<p>Your monthly income is determined before you retire based on your years of service, the average or the three highest years during your service and a specified multiplier (now 2.3%) You are guaranteed to receive this value for the rest of your life unless you choose a plan which assures your beneficiary of income after your death.</p>	<p>You are only guaranteed the size of your annuity at the time of retirement. You will specify your monthly retirement—usually ½ of 6% of your annuity, but that number will fluctuate as the amount in your account varies, depending on the interest rate it is earning.</p>
<p>You are guaranteed to receive this value for the rest of your life unless you choose a plan which assures your beneficiary of income after your death.</p>	<p>You are guaranteed an income only until the amount in your account is exhausted.</p>
<p>You cannot outlive your annuity.</p>	<p>If you live long enough to EXHAUST your annuity amount plus interest, your income from the annuity will stop.</p>
<p>Funds are managed by TRS investment professionals.</p>	<p>Funds are managed by you or by an investment professional which you employ, usually chosen from a State approved list of investment managers.</p>
<p>Interest income rate on your account will be based on the total amount in the TRS fund. The average varies; however the return is better because of the total amount of the fund.</p>	<p>Interest income on your account will be based on the amount in your account, and will generally be the prevailing rate for CDs or annuities.</p>
<p>Your cost of investment will be the total of the salaries of those TRS hires to administer the fund divided by the number of TRS members. Currently that is 1.3 million—a cost of only CENTS per year per TRS member!</p>	<p>The cost of investment will be the rate charged by the company you choose to manage your account. This can be a significant amount depending on the type of investments and the investment activity you choose.</p>

WHO WANTS TO CHANGE THE PLAN?

Primarily a group of investment management companies.

WHY ARE THEY PROMOTING DC PLANS & WHY ARE DC PLANS BEING CONSIDERED BY THE STATE?
To be able to act as managers of individual retiree accounts. There is a considerable amount of money involved.
To allow employers to reduce both benefits and contributions significantly.
In the opinion of those promoting a DC plan, to save money for the taxpayer of Texas. Texas taxpayers contribute considerably less than if teachers were under mandatory Social Security. Local schools would have to find the funds (\$5 billion per year) to pay the employer rate of 6.2%. By comparison, Texas taxpayers put in \$4 billion into TRS in 2011 and only \$3.54 billion in 2012. Current employees would also have to contribute the normal employee rate of 6.2%.

OPPONENTS ARE MAKING ALLEGATIONS ABOUT THE TRS DB PLAN

Allegation	Fact
The TRS fund is underfunded and going bankrupt.	TRS is underfunded because the State has reduced its contribution. However, it is 82% funded and exceeds the national standard and prominent accounting guidelines for measuring the health of a fund (80% is considered healthy).
The TRS Fund was hurt even more by the recession and it was irreparably damaged.	The TRS fund was hurt by the recession, but the high earnings of the fund have brought it back. The fund earned an average of 17% for the last year and has earned more than \$45 billion over the past three years.
As a retired or currently employed Texas public educator in the program, you will not be affected by such a change; only teachers entering the system AFTER the change will be affected.	This is FALSE! Although currently retired or employed Texas educators will remain in the current plan, without active employee contributions, which account for 20% of the value of the fund, TRS will NOT be able to maintain the current investment return—9.2% over the last 25 years and 15% over the last 3 years.



ADVOCACY TIPS

ADVOCACY AND POLITICAL ACTION

In a political sense, the term lobbyist refers to someone who seeks to influence legislation. TRTA's advocacy reflects that effort.

Lobbying is a concerted effort designed to achieve some result, typically from government authorities and elected officials. It consists of reaching out to legislative members, public actions (e.g. mass demonstrations) and encouraging constituents to contact their representatives. Practitioners may work in specialist organizations sometimes known as "government affairs" or "public affairs."

A lobbyist is a person who tries to influence legislation on behalf of a special interest. The effort is to influence issues and votes, either a vote FOR or AGAINST. The lobbyist speaks for his employer's interests as his employer's representative.

Informational lobbying, the use by interest groups of their (alleged) expertise or private information on issues of importance for policymakers, is often regarded as an important means of influence. Among the results are that legislators will, on average, make "better" decisions with lobbying than without, and that the more important an issue is to a special interest group, the more likely it is that the legislator will make the correct, full-information decision.

PAC

A Political Action Committee or a PAC is the name commonly given to a private group, regardless of size, organized to elect or defeat government officials or to promote legislation. State or federal laws regulate PACs. Under the Federal Election Campaign Act, an organization becomes a "political committee" by receiving contributions or making expenditures in excess of \$1000 for the purpose of influencing a federal election. The state may have similar regulations.

TRTA does not have a PAC. Why? The TRTA House of Delegates decides this issue and has chosen not to form a political action committee.

TRTA has a volunteer legislative committee. In 2012, the TRTA Legislative Training Initiative was implemented at the local, district and state level. Any member of TRTA can download the documents created for the TRTA Legislative Training Initiative on www.trta.org/legcomm and also view several training videos.

EFFECTIVE DIRECT ADVOCACY TIPS

We have several tips for making sure your meeting goes smoothly and your concerns are heard. Please be aware that legislators and staffers are often pressed for time and meet with many constituents during any given day. You want your message to be memorable for the right reasons, so remember the following:

IDENTIFY YOURSELF: Give your Senator or Representative or their staff member your business card.

BREVITY: In order to be effective, your presentations must be short. Whether your presentation is an informal conversation with an elected official in the hallway or a very structured presentation before an appropriations committee, it should be emphatic and to the point. You should always introduce yourself and tell whom you represent (including the number of TRS members in the elected official's district if you have it), the extent of your interest and involvement with a particular issue, and why you believe there is a need for some specific legislation to address the problem.

ACCURACY: You should always provide accurate information. The credibility of your testimony depends on its accuracy. If you cannot supply documentation to support your claim, do not make the statement. Since most of the issues you will be supporting will require repeated interaction with elected officials, administrators or staff in their offices, it is best to start with a correct base of information. Never lie! If you do not know an answer to a question, respond with "I don't know, but I will find that information for you" rather than guessing.

PREPARATION: Be prepared. Review any bills you plan to discuss thoroughly along with the support materials you are bringing along so that you may speak knowledgably. Anticipate questions. Before you meet with any elected official or community leader, have your thoughts organized. Remember that the burden of proof is on you. In order for you to be effective, you must establish your position with clear and convincing evidence. TRTA Fact Pages (provided by the state office) are excellent resources for you and your legislators.

COURTESY: Be polite, not demanding. Too often, advocates alienate entire legislative committees even though some of the elected officials may have been in agreement with the position originally. This change in attitude often occurs because the advocate was rude, hostile or combative.

PROTOCOL: You should address the elected official using a proper salutation (for example, Senator Harris or Representative Smith). Attire is business. Always carry your RTA business cards if you have them (or consider having some made). A business card provides a quick and easy method for legislators and staffers to get in touch with you if questions arise after your appointment.

APPRECIATION: Thank the elected official. Too often, we ask elected officials to act in our interest, but we fail to express our appreciation. When your elected official does something for you, respond accordingly with a note of gratitude, recapping what the elected official has agreed to do. When drafting your letter or email, keep in mind that your letter or parts of it may show up in the future campaign literature. Consider checking with your legislative chair, lobbyist, state president or executive director before sending the letter.

REPORT BACK TO TRTA: Contact the TRTA state office to let us know how your meeting went. What questions did the legislator pose that we can help answer? What concerns do you have as a constituent that were raised during the meeting? Your feedback is vital to our staff and state legislative committee and allows us to cultivate the relationship you have established with your elected official.

FOLLOW UP: Be sure to maintain contact with your elected official throughout legislative session and during the interim between sessions. If you are not able to schedule additional personal visits to the legislator's office, use other methods of contact such as phone calls and emails. Take note of any questions or concerns your legislator mentioned during your meeting and try to provide additional information based on those inquiries. TRTA staff is happy to assist you in answering any queries or sending additional information about TRTA issues.

HOW DOES ALL OF THIS ACTIVITY APPEAR TO ELECTED OFFICIALS?

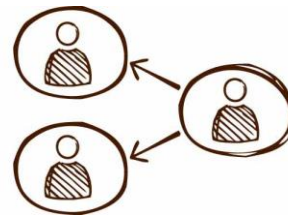
Lobbying is fair persuasion, responsible action, desired input and mutually useful. Elected officials expect to be contacted, and actually need to be contacted in order to do their job well. They may be helping you, but you are also helping them. In addition, because you are a volunteer, your opinion is more valued because you represent what you believe.

Your legislator is charged with representing all of the constituents in his or her district. Many times, they have information that you do not have. Try to understand their problems, outlooks, and objections. Never threaten political consequences.

Most controversial legislation is the result of compromise. There will be times when legislation does not go your way, so do not be too critical. Remember that you can simply not agree. Be wary of public criticisms of your legislator. Some legislators can be persuaded in the final vote to vote your way. It is much more effective to sit down in private to discuss the issue and a legislator's vote.

TRTA does not endorse candidates for office and does not have a PAC (political action committee). As an organization, we strive to work with all elected officials for the best outcomes for all TRS annuitants. Using the aforementioned guidelines will help you become a better advocate.

*Develop a member network.
Volunteer for the local legislative committee.*



LEGISLATIVE SESSION COMMUNICATION TIPS

STATE LEVEL: TRTA has an Executive Director, a contracted lobbyist, several contracted consultants, a volunteer legislative coordinator and dedicated staff members for legislative issues. They represent the association at every major legislative meeting and hearing at the Capitol. The TRTA State Legislative Committee members have scheduled day(s) at the Capitol during the session. The State Legislative Committee is divided into groups that will visit the Capitol and meet with Representatives and Senators. The committee members represent our members' legislative priorities and will advocate for any bills that address TRS issues.

LOCAL AND DISTRICT LEVEL: The most important and effective advocacy effort occurs at the **local level in the Representatives' and Senators' district offices.** Your visits to the district offices to discuss issues that affect education retirees and ask for their support on TRTA bills has been very effective. This should continue for the rest of the year. Information will be posted on the TRTA web site.

TELEPHONE CALLS: Phone calls are **VERY** important. Always identify yourself, speak to the issue **and stay on message.** Do not digress! Before closing, ask the person if he or she has any questions for you. If you do not know the answer, tell them that you will get that information back to them quickly.

LETTER: Handwritten one-page letters (no form letters) are very effective. Remember to **stay on message.** Ask the Representative/Senator for active support. If you ask your legislator to vote FOR or AGAINST a bill, be prepared to defend your position. (See sample letter on page 15)

EMAIL: Emails have become an effective way to communicate with a legislator's office staff. Still, stay on the message, write to the issue and ask for the legislator's support. You usually get a response within four days. Action alerts sent via the *Inside Line* are an efficient and quick way to respond. **Sign up for this free service at trta.org/the-inside-line.**

TELEPHONE CALLS and handwritten letters ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE. During the previous session, our calls completely overpowered the 800 number (888.674.3788) at the Capitol. The message recorders were filled to capacity, and the email boxes were filled. **This works!**

SOCIAL MEDIA: We must use **ALL** of our current methods for effectively communicating with our elected officials. The use of **Facebook, Twitter,** and other forms of social media is a must. When visiting with the staff of Representatives and Senators, ask if they are using these sources of communication. If so, use them! It can be quick, efficient and effective!

For association updates, you can follow:

TRTA Facebook page: www.facebook.com/TexasRetiredTeachers

TRTA Twitter feed: twitter.com/TRTA

TRTA YouTube channel: youtube.com/theTRTAtv

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Senator/Representative (name) _____,

Thank you for your service to the state of Texas. I know that representing all of the constituents of this district is a great responsibility.

My name is _____. I am a registered voter and a retired teacher. I am very interested in maintaining the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) for current and future retirees.

TRS is a well-managed, cost-effective system for the taxpayers of this state. While pension programs in other states may have serious problems, TRS Texas does not. I am asking for your support to:

1. maintain the TRS defined benefit plan;
2. increase the state contribution to TRS (raise the base funding) in order to make the fund actuarially sound, so that the system may provide a cost-of-living increase for current retirees; and
3. develop a plan for making the system actuarially sound for the future.

I am also asking for your support of the TRS-Care health insurance program. Health care is the number priority of retirees. TRS-Care participants pay premiums, co-pays, and out-of-pocket expenses. This benefit is not given to us by the government. TRS-Care has faced significant shortfalls over the past several biennia. Last session, this resulted in major program changes and premium increases for retirees living on fixed incomes.

In 2019, the program will face yet another imminent shortfall if nothing is done to improve funding for the program. Retirees, who live with no guarantee of receiving a raise, cannot afford to bear additional costs to maintain TRS-Care. Please help repair this much needed and very valuable health care program! Please raise the base funding for this vital program.

Our retirees give back to their local communities. We support the local economy with our pension income, generating millions in state revenues. When we began teaching, we knew our salaries would be low but that our pensions would be there when we retired. We appreciate the benefits we receive from TRS and need your support to maintain them for the long-term.

Thank you again for your service and for your support of these issues.

Respectfully,

Name, Address, Phone number, Email

LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION

GOLDEN RULES FOR GRASSROOTS INVOLVEMENT

Legislators are most interested in their **constituent** opinions. **Therefore, the most effective communication comes from local units that hold their legislators accountable.** The following suggestions can be useful in assuring that local members are heard.

1. Stay well informed

- The *Inside Line* is used to keep members up-to-date. Please encourage your local members to sign up for this wonderful feature (trta.org/the-inside-line). Be sure to read *The VOICE* you receive each quarter and keep it as a reference. You may consider making copies of articles or fact pages printed in *The VOICE* to take with you to your visits with legislators.

2. Put someone in charge

- Develop a member network. Use a telephone committee for quick response as well as an email list. As alerts are sent, especially during session, have a plan ready to activate your local members into action. All local members should be participants in your plan. Legislators note the number of contacts that are made on a particular issue by their constituents. The person organizing this should be your local unit legislative chair.

3. Set up an appointment

- It is important to first try and meet with your legislator in his or her district office. It is best to take no more than three to four members to your appointment. Your time will be limited, so get to the point. Discuss your concerns with accurate facts. It might help to have a written document outlining your points to leave with the legislator. Be sure to thank the legislator and let them know that you will be contacting them again during the session. Let TRTA know that you have had a meeting so that a follow up can be made during session or sooner. Having a bill number is important during the legislative session.

4. Get personally acquainted

- Make sure that your members get to know their Senator, Representative and their staff as well as candidates running for office. Take a sincere interest in your legislators by attending their events. They need to know of your community involvement and that you want your issues addressed. Discuss TRTA priorities and be prepared to answer questions. If you do not know the answer, tell the legislator that you will find out and get back to them.

5. Send letters and emails

- When writing a letter, please reference only one bill. Be sure to place the bill number at the top of your letter. Present your issue logically and use facts. Emotional appeals usually do not influence a vote. Use background material provided by TRTA (fact pages from *The VOICE*, for example). Give facts and opinions concerning the effects of a particular measure on public school retirees.
- The importance of contacting a legislator on time cannot be overemphasized. The most eloquent letter does no good if it arrives after a vote. Using email is a great way to send your message quickly. Email addresses for Texas legislators are configured as such: firstname.lastname@house.state.tx.us or firstname.lastname@senate.state.tx.us. You might also call your legislator's office and ask for the email address of the staff member that works on retirement issues.

6. Vote!

- Although TRTA does not endorse candidates for political office, we do encourage our members always to exercise their right to vote. Opportunities to vote include primary elections, run-offs, and general elections. As an organization, our political power lies in the strength of our members. Use your voice to vote for the candidates you believe are representing your interests. Do not assume that your neighbors, colleagues or fellow TRTA members are voting. Your vote counts! Election dates are included on page 18.

7. Understand your influence

- The strength of our organization lies in your decision to be involved. TRTA becomes stronger by encouraging other TRS annuitants to get involved. The more we are seen and heard, the stronger we become. Joining a local unit or encouraging other TRS retirees to join local units is a great way to grow our influence.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

2019

- January 8 86th Legislature convenes at noon
Government Code, Sec. 301.001
- March 16 Deadline for filing bills and joint resolutions other than
local bills, emergency appropriations, and bills that have
been declared an emergency by the Governor
House Rule 8, Sec. 8; Senate Rule 7.07 (b)
- May 27 Last day of the 86th regular session; corrections only in
House and Senate
Sec. 24 (b), Art. III, Texas Constitution
- June 17 Last day Governor can sign or veto bills passed during
the regular legislative session
Sec. 14, Art. IV, Texas Constitution
- August 31 Date that bills without specific effective dates (that could
not be effective immediately) become law

USEFUL WEBSITES

These websites are useful when researching legislative topics (including the defined benefit vs. defined contribution debate), Texas legislators, and U.S. Congressmen.

Texas Legislature Online

www.capitol.state.tx.us
(mobile: <http://www.txlegis.com>)

Tax Payers for Common Sense

www.taxpayer.net

House Research Organization

<http://www.hro.house.state.tx.us>

Government Officials

www.3capwiz.com/y/dbg/officials

Senate Research Center

<http://www.senate.texas.gov/src.php>

Legislative Reference Library

<http://www.lrl.state.tx.us>

Texas Pension Review Board

www.prb.state.tx.us

Texas Public Policy Foundation

www.texaspolicy.com

Secretary of State

www.sos.state.tx.us

Economic Policy Institute

www.epi.org

Legislative Budget Board

www.lbb.state.tx.us

Center for Public Policy Priorities

www.cppp.org

Library of Congress THOMAS

<http://thomas.loc.gov>

Texas Tribune

texastribune.org

National Institute on Retirement Security

nirsonline.org

Laura and John Arnold Foundation

<http://www.arnoldfoundation.org>

TRTA Sites and Social Media

Texas Retired Teachers Association

www.trta.org

TRTA Facebook page

www.facebook.com/TexasRetiredTeachers

TRTA Twitter feed

twitter.com/TRTA

TRTA YouTube channel

www.youtube.com/user/TheTRTATV

