

President's Message for February 2018 by Richard C. Warbrouck

As I write this article for our February Newsletter we have reached the thirty-fifth day of the sixty day 2018 Legislative Session. There are a number of bills that we are monitoring that would if passed, impact the LEOFF I and LEOFF II Retirement Systems.

- HB 2719 would change the threshold from a population of 20,000 to 30,000 to require the city to create a LEOFF I Disability Board.
- SB 6300 would create a property tax exemption for spouses of military members and first responders killed in the line of duty. This would apply to LEOFF I and LEOFF II.
- HB 2645 clarifies armed conflicts related to determining eligibility for certain pension related military service benefits for members of retirement systems.
- SB 6213-HB 2633 Addressing the presumption of occupational disease for purposes of workers' compensation by adding medical conditions to the presumption and extending the presumption to certain publicly employed firefighters and investigators and law enforcement.
- SB 6214 Allowing industrial insurance coverage for post-traumatic stress disorders of law enforcement officers and firefighters. If enacted, this measure would create a presumption, with regard to firefighters and law enforcement officers.
- HB 2693 Just for you information, HB 2693 would raise the mandatory age from 65 to 68 for the Washington State patrol officers.

When I first read HB 2719 I was not too concerned. There are about nine cities in southwest Washington that will soon reach a population of 20,000 and will be required to establish a LEOFF I Disability Board. These cities are now under the county disability board and would rather stay under the county board and not have the expense or the responsibility to administer their own disability boards until they reach a population of 30,000. After I studied the bill I realized we would have to have the bill amended or try to kill the bill as written because it could cause a lot of problems legal and administrative if those cities, approximately 30, with a population of 20,000 and over with established disability boards tried to dismantle those boards and revert to the county boards until they reached a population of 30,000. For example, if ten of those cities chose to disband their board and go under the county board it would create a real problem for the county. The county could then be in a position to administer ten levels of benefits plus their own. The other choice would be to reduce the benefits of any city that had higher benefits than the county down to the county level and raise the benefits of any city that had benefits lower than the county up to the county level.

When I testified at the House Local Government Committee Hearing I asked that the bill be amended to grandfather in those cities of 20,000 that have established disability boards or to exempt those cities out of the bill. As I testified before the Committee one member on the committee stated that there is nothing in the bill that states that those cities can dismantle their boards. My response was that there is nothing in the bill to say that they can't.

I am pleased to report that there is now a Substitute House Bill 2719 with language similar to what we suggested. The new bill states in part:

If the city has a population of at least twenty thousand and such city established its disability board on or before the effective date of this section. The operations of an existing city disability board created on or before the effective date of this section shall be maintained by the city and the city shall continue to carry out the benefits as provided by the established city disability board.

Once again we were the only retiree group to testify on this bill or to contact the Chair of the Local Government Committee or individual committee members to express our position on HB 2719.

Dave Peery, of the so-called Coalition with only one member group, called Ken Crowder, a retired Snohomish Deputy Sheriff whom I keep informed along with Jerry Taylor, President of the Seattle Retired Police Officers Association. Dave told Ken that he had heard that there was a bill dealing with disability boards. Ken asked what the bill number was and Dave said that he didn't know. How can that be, when we posted it on Jerry's website and they, the Coalition, have Joyce Willms who I used to refer to as a volunteer lobbyist because she never reported any salary as a lobbyist on her previous Public Disclosure (PDC) L-2 reports. This has now been corrected as the Coalition now reports as her employer on their PDC L-3 reports that she was paid \$13,321.25 for 2017. I find this a little difficult to understand when she never knew of the previous merger attempts nor of the merger proposal being discussed in the Budget Committee during the 2017 Special Session. Now she apparently failed to notify Dave Peery, the appointed Secretary of the Coalition that HB 2719 had been introduced.

If the Substitute House bill is not passed or if passed with our amendment I am sure the Coalition will take credit as they did in their last donation request letter for stopping the merger attempts and for the several bills they listed that we had introduced and passed since the year 2000.

I do become frustrated when I realize that out of the 7,300 LEOFF I members there is only about 1500 who pay for their representation and who are being kept up to date on the various issues that impact their pension and retirement. There has to be a better way.

I want to answer the most frequent question that I get this time of year. The projected CPI, (COLA) cost of living adjustment for LEOFF I Retirement System due in April based on your retirement date. For retirement dates between:

- April 2, 2017 – March 31, 2018 0.00%
- January 1, 2017 – April 1, 2017 3.32%
- April 2, 2016 – December 31, 2016 5.68%
- Prior to April 2, 2016 3.32%

I want to thank our Eastside reporter Ray Sanderson for these figures and reminds us that DRS has not certified these COLA's at this time.