



MIDDLESEX COUNTY RETIREMENT SYSTEM NEWS

Celebrating Over 100 Years of Public Service

Spring 2020

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The Essential Role of MCRS



*By Thomas Gibson,
Chairman*

On March 23, 2020, the Governor issued COVID-19 Order No. 13, an Order Assuring Continued Operation of Essential Services in the Commonwealth, Closing Certain Workplaces, and Prohibiting Gatherings of More Than 10 People. The Order specified that Massachusetts retirement systems provide “COVID-19 essential services” because they “provide services for or determine eligibility for public benefits” and provide “payroll and employee benefit services.”

Retirees with a reliable pension act as an economic stabilizer by maintaining spending throughout their retirement years, regardless of the ups and downs of the economy. As previously reported here, in 2016 - the last year that state-wide statistics were available - more than 224,000 residents of Massachusetts received a total of \$7.1 billion in pension benefits from state and local pension plans. The National Institute for Retirement Security calculated that every \$1 a retiree earned in pension benefits supported \$1.51 in total economic activity in Massachusetts. And every \$1 of taxpayer contributions invested in the Massachusetts state and local pension plans supported \$4.60 in total economic output within the state.

MCRS and its capable staff are fulfilling their essential role in helping to keep the economy moving during this unprecedented period. From January through May of 2020, MCRS has issued over \$65 million in benefits to its members and their beneficiaries. In 2019, our retired public employees and their families received over \$150 million in retirement benefits, funds spent largely in the local economy for food, shelter, medical care, and other life necessities.

For further information on the favorable economic impact of public pensions in Massachusetts, and across the United States, go to **www.nirsonline.org**.

Board Votes Maximum COLA Increase to Retirees

The Middlesex County Retirement Board voted unanimously on February 19th to grant retirees the maximum allowable Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). The maximum annual COLA allowed by law for retirees of the Middlesex County Retirement System is 3% of the first \$16,000 of retirement benefits, or \$480.00. This increase will take effect on July 1st.

www.middlesexretirement.org

Survivor Benefits Available Should You Die Prior to Retirement

On March 2, 2020, the Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission released updated beneficiary selection forms for our active members. It presented us with an opportunity to remind you how important it is to have an updated beneficiary selection form on file with the retirement office. A completed beneficiary designation form will instruct us who should receive a survivor benefit should you die prior to retirement.

There are two types of benefits available to you. Only one will be paid.

Lump-Sum Benefit. Your first option is to name any person or entity as your lump-sum beneficiary. Multiple beneficiaries can be named. They will be entitled to the retirement contributions that have been credited to your account throughout your public employment in the proportions you designate. MCRS will pay the amount owed to the beneficiary or beneficiaries named on the Beneficiary Selection Form for Refund of Accumulated Deductions, unless another section of the retirement plan governs. This is a one-time lump sum payment. You can download this form, also known as the Beneficiary Selection Form for Active Member – Lump Sum, from our website at www.middlesexretirement.org/Resources/Forms and Retirement Guides. Completed forms should be mailed to the retirement office, as the original document with your signature is required.

Monthly Survivor Benefit. Your second option is to nominate a single beneficiary for the Option D, or member survivor allowance. Option D is simply a reference to the section of the retirement plan that provides for the monthly survivor benefit. You can name only one Option D beneficiary and it must be your spouse, child, former spouse who has not remarried, parent or sibling. Your nominated Option D beneficiary must receive the monthly allowance. The Board is precluded from paying the lump-sum benefit of your accumulated retirement deductions if there is a named Option D beneficiary on file.

If you do not make an Option D designation, your spouse can still elect to receive the Option D benefit if:

- you had completed at least two years of creditable service;
- you and your spouse had been married for at least one year; and
- you and your spouse had been living together at the time of your death.

If you and your spouse were not living together, the Board must find that it was for justifiable cause.

It is important to note that the rights of an eligible surviving spouse will always supersede any other person nominated. Therefore, you may name a young child as the Option D beneficiary knowing that your surviving spouse can always elect to receive the allowance instead of the child.

To nominate a single Option D beneficiary to receive a monthly survivor allowance, complete the Beneficiary Selection Form – Option D. You can download this form, also known as the Beneficiary Selection Form for Active Member – Option D, from our website at www.middlesexretirement.org/Resources/Forms and Retirement Guides. Completed forms should be mailed to the retirement office, as the original document with your signature is required.

Do not worry! Beneficiary designations on file with the retirement office that were made using the old Beneficiary Selection Form are still valid. However, we do encourage all of our members to update their beneficiary designations as life events happen.

For more information, please visit our website at **www.middlesexretirement.org**.

Social Security Update

By Francine Kollias, MCRS Social Security Specialist

Improvements to Service Delivery



In June 2019, Andrew M. Saul was appointed Commissioner of the Social Security Administration for a six-year term. The Commissioner has extensive experience in the private sector and has held multiple positions in all levels of federal and state

government. He accepted this position because he believes in the importance of Social Security, specifically acknowledging that the SSA “must dramatically improve customer service for you, your loved ones, and everyone who depends on our programs.”

The Commissioner’s plan is rooted in “common sense,” and his mission is to restore fundamental public service. This means answering phone calls, serving the public who visit local offices, and making payments to beneficiaries on a timely basis.

His goals include:

- modernizing technology to meet the convenience of online services while maintaining a workforce responsive to the needs of those who need more personal service;
- paying benefits to entitled beneficiaries in the correct amounts; and
- providing additional staff training to ensure the correct application of SSA policies.

Implementation of these goals has already begun. The agency is shifting resources to the front lines of their public service operation, including field offices and the national call center.

Commissioner Saul is also committed to hiring more staff, extending office hours, and making more employees available to the public.

Over the last five years as MCRS’s Social Security Specialist, I have heard many of you express frustration and confusion regarding Social Security issues. Commissioner Saul may be the one to address many of your concerns. I encourage all of you to go to www.ssa.gov and scroll to “Press Releases” to read his November 4, 2019 Open Letter to the Public.

Calling All Members: Do You Have A Change of Address?

Please notify the Middlesex County Retirement System **in writing** of any change of address. Be it a permanent address change or a temporary winter mailing address, the retirement staff wants to ensure you receive important notices.

Please visit our website at www.middlesexretirement.org to download a Change of Address Form. Then **mail or fax** the form to our office. For security purposes, we require the original document with your signature.



MCRS Pension Education Series Postponed

Due to the state of emergency, the Middlesex County Retirement System’s Education Series, *Understanding Your Public Pension and Social Security*, has been postponed.

Each year the Board eagerly anticipates these regional meetings with our members and their families. Board Chairman Tom Gibson, Chief Administrative Officer Lisa Maloney, and the System’s Social Security Advisor Francine Kollias deliver a two-hour presentation and answer questions on MCRS retirement benefits, the Windfall Elimination Provision, Government Pension Offset and the basics of Social Security.

This year, our priority necessarily is the public safety and health of our community and staff. For that reason, the spring meetings in Billerica, Wilmington and Hopkinton have been postponed. We hope to resume in the fall with programs in Groton, Stow and Tyngsborough. Please check our website regularly for more information.



2020 MCRS Pension Payment Schedule

Direct Deposit of your monthly benefit occurs on the last business day of the month.

Month	2020 Direct Deposit Dates
June	Tuesday, 6/30
July	Friday, 7/31
August	Monday, 8/31
September	Wednesday, 9/30
October	Friday, 10/30
November	Monday, 11/30
December	Thursday, 12/31



Photo by brucehilliard.com

RETIREE SPOTLIGHT

Anne Butters, Town of Wilmington

At the “young” age of 102, Anne Butters’ life story is one of hard work, perseverance and family. A three-star athlete and student body leader, she is part of the oldest family in Wilmington, as well as the oldest retiree in our System. But for this centenarian who will turn 103 in September, family is at the core of everything she does.

A lifelong resident of Wilmington, Anne is a ninth-generation descendant of the town’s first settler. She graduated from Wilmington High School in 1935. She then studied nursing at the Massachusetts School of Nursing at Boston City Hospital and took classes at Emerson College. Her first job was a private duty nurse in Boston with an annual salary of \$2,000 in 1942.

About two years later, Anne began working for the town of Wilmington as a public health nurse. She ended her career there more than 30 years later, retiring in 1981 with a well-earned pension from MCRS.

In 2016—more than 80 years after graduation—she was inducted into the Wilmington High School Sports Hall of Fame for field hockey, basketball and girl’s baseball. “No, not softball,” as she explains how the baseball was lighter than baseballs today.

Anne is the oldest of six children, many of whom stayed in the local area. Although she never married, she lovingly talks about her more than 20 nieces and nephews and nearly 50 grand nieces and nephews. “We celebrate a lot of birthdays!”

This MCRS retiree still has a full plate even 39 years into retirement. She enjoys working around the yard, going to Gloucester for a lobster lunch and visiting with family, many of whom live nearby. While she spent many summers in Laconia, New Hampshire, one of her favorite places of all is still the Wilmington Commons.

Does she have any advice for members of the Class of 2020 who are graduating this year without a traditional graduation, and a season void of sports and other activities?

**“Celebrate with your family.
Work hard and someday you’ll
look back on this chapter as just
one moment in time.”**

Encouraging words from our oldest retiree.
Thank you Anne Butters.

Planning to retire soon?

Keep this checklist in mind as your retirement date approaches.

One year
*before
retirement*

Generate an estimate using one of our available resources:

- » Group percentage charts posted on our website at <https://middlesexretirement.org/resources/group-classifications>
- » Online calculator accessible via <https://www.mass.gov/pension-estimate-calculator-msrb>
- » Completing and returning to our office an Estimate Request Form posted on our website at <https://middlesexretirement.org/resources/forms-and-retirement-guides>

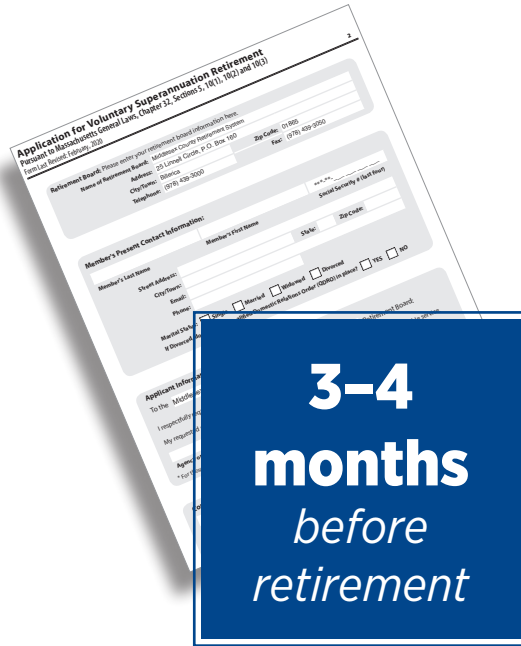
Contact your employer to confirm the health insurance coverage for which you will qualify as a retiree. Be sure to ask about coverage for your spouse or other dependents while you are retired and in the event of your death.

9 months
*before
retirement*

Apply for and purchase service credit enhancements, if applicable, for which you have not yet established credit:

- » refund buybacks/redeposits
- » military service
- » service as a call firefighter or permanent intermittent/reserve police officer
- » other prior non-contributing service

For more information, visit our website at **www.middlesexretirement.org**.



Download an Application for Superannuation Retirement with Option Selection Form from our website at www.middlesexretirement.org.

Be sure to gather and submit all necessary documents listed on the application cover sheet.

Submit your application and option selection form to the retirement office.

Complete any necessary insurance paperwork provided by your employer.



Remember!

- » As a retiree you are paid in arrears on the last business day of every month. Be prepared financially for the gap between your last paycheck as an active employee and your first payment as a retiree.
- » You will not receive a direct deposit statement every month. You will receive one with your first payment, when there are changes in your benefit amount, and each July and December.
- » You may change your direct deposit information or your tax withholding at any time. Download the Direct Deposit Change Form or the W-4P form from our website and mail it to the retirement office. Please do not fax or email your requests.
- » Keep your address current by downloading from our website and mailing to our office a Change of Address Form as necessary.
- » Finally, if you selected payment Option C at retirement, remember to notify us if your named beneficiary predeceases you. We will re-calculate your benefit and you will receive the higher Option A payment amount.

Post-Retirement Earnings Restrictions Temporarily Suspended for Non-Disability Retirees

As a result of the increased demand for public services during the COVID-19 pandemic, the hours and earnings restrictions for non-disability retirees working in the Massachusetts public sector have been suspended.

Under Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020, post-retirement earnings calculations for the calendar year 2020 will not include work hours and earnings during the declared state of emergency, which commenced on March 10, 2020. It is not required that the post-retirement public services be related to COVID-19.

Disability retirees working in the public sector are still subject to the hours and earnings limitations. They are restricted to working 960 hours in a calendar year. They may earn no more than the difference between the salary paid in their former position minus their retirement allowance, plus an additional \$15,000.

If you have questions regarding your post-retirement earnings, please write to mrs@middlesexretirement.org.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY
RETIREMENT BOARD

Thomas F. Gibson, Chairman
Brian P. Curtin, Vice Chair
John Brown, Elected Member

Joseph W. Kearns, Elected Member
Robert W. Healy, Appointed Member
Lisa M. Maloney, Chief Administrative Officer

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