Middlesex County Retirement System News

Celebrating Over 100 Years of Public Service

Spring 2024

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Meet PERAC's New Executive Director

In February, the Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC) selected PERAC Assistant Deputy Director Bill Keefe as its new Executive Director, succeeding John Parsons. The appointment was a culmination of a six-month search process involving over 30 applicants, multiple interviews, and public interviews with three finalists.

Bill Keefe
PERAC Executive Director

Bill Keefe is no stranger to public service. Prior to joining PERAC in 2019, Bill served in a variety of capacities over 23 years in the Office of the State Auditor, under former Auditors Joe DeNucci and Suzanne Bump, most recently as the Director of Audit Planning

At PERAC, Bill has functioned as the Commission's legislative director, and oversaw the Audit, Compliance, and Communications units. A graduate of Syracuse University with a bachelor's degree in journalism and political science, Bill has also worked as a former reporter and editor at the MetroWest Daily News. He resides in Arlington and is the father of three children of whom Bill is immensely proud: Abby, 21, graduating magna cum laude from Salem State in May with a nursing degree; Tommy, 20, currently serving in the US Army infantry and stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington; and Charlie, 17, a junior at Northeast Metro Tech in Wakefield studying metal fabrication.

The Board looks forward to continuing its beneficial relationship with PERAC and working with Bill, who has already accepted the Board's invitation to attend the December meeting of the Board and the Advisory Council.

Board Votes Maximum COLA Increase to Retirees

The Middlesex County Retirement Board voted unanimously on March 20th to grant retirees the maximum allowable Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). The maximum 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 per year. This increase will take effect on July 1.

Working and Collecting Social Security

Have you ever wondered why some of your colleagues and friends are still working full time in the public sector and collecting their social security benefits and you are not? There's a simple reason why and it's based on the Social Security Administration's regulations.

Full Retirement Age and Older

Social Security rules allow individuals to collect their social security benefits while working in the public sector regardless of how much they earn when they reach their full retirement age. (See chart.) Middlesex County Retirement System members who meet the age requirement have no earnings limitations. Earnings for social security purposes are your gross wages or your net profit from self-employment.

In addition, those who collect social security while working will not be affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset until they retire and receive their retirement allowance from the Middlesex County Retirement System.

How It Works: The Year Full Retirement Age is Reached

In the year you reach your full retirement age, earnings limits are in place from January until the month you achieve full retirement age. In 2024 the annual earnings limit for these months is $59,520. If your annual earnings exceed $59,520, you will lose $1.00 in social security benefits for every $3.00 you earn over the limit.

Assume 2024 is the year you reach full retirement age, and your birthday is in November. You're limited to earning $59,520 from January through October. If you expect your earnings for those months to be less than the $59,520 limit, you should apply to start collecting your social security in January 2024.

> EARNINGS FOR SOCIAL SECURITY PURPOSES ARE YOUR GROSS WAGES OR YOUR NET PROFIT FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT.

If you wait until the month you reach full retirement age to start collecting social security, and realize you could have begun your benefits in January 2024 without exceeding the earnings limitations, you may not be maximizing your social security benefits! The best advice is to begin researching your options and social security benefits as you get close to Social Security's full retirement age.

How it Works: Under Full Retirement Age Year

If you have not reached your full retirement year and are still working, the rules are very different. You must earn under the social security earnings limit to collect all your social security benefits while working.

In 2024 the limit is $22,320. If you earn over the earnings limit in a calendar year, Social Security reduces the benefits you would receive $1.00 for every $2.00 earned over the limit.

For example, the 2024 earnings limit is $22,320. If you earn $48,320 in gross wages, you are $26,000 over the limit. Before you are paid any benefits, Social Security will take away $13,000 in social security benefits payable ($13,000 = ½ of the $26,000).

The higher your earnings the more you lose in social security benefits. Often full-time employment results in you receiving no social security payments because the earnings limit is so low when you have not yet reached full retirement age.

For more information about your benefits at full retirement age visit the Social Security Administration's website at www.ssa.gov.

Your Social Security Statement will reflect your full (100%) social security benefit and your Full Retirement Age.

YEAR OF BIRTH	FULL RETIREMENT AGE
1937 or earlier	65
1938	65 + 2 Months
1939	65 + 4 Months
1940	65 + 6 Months
1941	65 + 8 Months
1942	65 + 10 Months
1943-1954	66
1955	66 + 2 Months
1956	66 + 4 Months
1957	66 + 6 Months
1958	66 + 8 Months
1959	66 + 10 Months
1960 or later	67

MCRS Retirement Checklist

One year
before retirement

- **Request a benefit estimate**
- **Confirm Health Insurance Coverage With Your Employer**
- **Apply for and Purchase Service Credit Enhancements**

3-4 months
before retirement

- **Submit a Completed Retirement Application AND Option Selection Form to the Retirement Office**

1 month
AFTER retirement

- **Expect Your First Direct Deposit. *When?* The Last Business Day of the Month Following Your Effective Date of Retirement**

» Visit the Resources tab on our website at **www.middlesexretirement.org** to download the appropriate forms and applications.

Billerica's Veteran Services' Head Clerk Retires After 43 Years

Marie O'Rourke

When Marie O'Rourke retired May 31st, she said goodbye to the only department she had worked in during her 43-year career. O'Rourke began as the Senior Clerk, finished as the Head Clerk, and impacted thousands of lives along the way.

"I love my job. I love the people I deal with, and when I walk out the door that last day it will be very, very difficult," O'Rourke said in mid-May. "But I also recognize that the time is right for me to move on."

However, she will not be going far as she still lives in town and serves as the Governor's Appointment to the Housing Authority and is a member of the Board of Health. She knew retirement was near and had originally planned to finish 2024. When she decided to move her retirement up six months, she immediately called MCRS and came in to meet with staff to ensure her account and paperwork were in order, and submitted timely.

"I LOVE MY JOB. I LOVE THE PEOPLE I DEAL WITH, AND WHEN I WALK OUT THE DOOR THAT LAST DAY IT WILL BE VERY, VERY DIFFICULT," - MARIE O'ROURKE

O'Rourke's career has been about helping people. In fact, two pivotal moments in her career involve helping others during the holidays. She co-founded the Billerica Food Pantry that was operated from the department for nearly three decades.

One Thanksgiving she met a veteran at the elevator to give him a turkey and he was crying, emotional because he "never thought he'd get to the point where someone would give him a holiday dinner."

The other time was around Christmas and involved the "Clause for a Cause" program which also operated from the Veteran Services department. Her department had just presented a young girl with Down Syndrome a new bicycle. O'Rourke recalled that the young girl was so excited that she started learning to ride the bike right then and there in the hallway of Town Hall!

We asked O'Rourke what type of advice she would give someone thinking about retirement and she was quick to answer, "Think twice before you retire! Make sure you are retiring for the right reasons and it's something you are ready to do. Retire for yourself."

On behalf of all of us at MCRS, we wish Marie the best in this new chapter.

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

News From the Legislative Front

By Thomas Gibson

At press time, a number of bills impacting the public retirement laws have been wending their way through Beacon Hill.

With reference to members who are military veterans, both the Governor's Heroes Act (H4172) and An Act Relative to Veterans' Buyback (S1750) were favorably reported out of committee on May 2, 2024. Both bills clarify and confirm a veteran's right to obtain retirement service credit for their military service, and would provide public workers who missed a prior opportunity to purchase military service with a second chance to do so.

Section 16 of Governor Healey's Municipal Empowerment Act (S2571) would allow a local governmental entity to hire public retirees into positions where there exists a certified critical shortage of qualified applicants. The provision, which excludes disability retirees, would exempt such retirees from the hours and earning restrictions currently existing in the law. The deadline for reporting the bill out of committee is June 14, 2024.

When a municipal retirement board cannot agree on the selection of a fifth member of the retirement board, the current law refers that appointment to the chief executive officer of the municipality (e.g., mayor, select board). H2508 would instead empower the Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission to appoint the fifth member from a list of candidates submitted by the retirement board. H2508 has widespread support and was ordered to third reading in the House on April 16, 2024.

H2588 and S1691, bills that would exempt pay increases granted to workers under the Massachusetts Equity Pay Act (MEPA) from the anti-spiking restrictions in the retirement law, are currently in the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

We will continue to report timely on these and other bills that impact our members and beneficiaries.

2024 MCRS Pension Payment Schedule

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

Month	2024 Direct Deposit Dates
June	Friday, 6/28
July	Wednesday, 7/31
August	Friday, 8/30
September	Monday, 9/30
October	Thursday, 10/31
November	Friday, 11/29
December	Tuesday, 12/31

Take Advantage of Service Purchases to Increase Your Benefits

Creditable service is one of the factors used to calculate your retirement allowance. You may be eligible to enhance the amount of creditable service you have accrued by purchasing non-contributing service rendered prior to establishing membership with the Middlesex County Retirement System, or by redepositing a refund. The time purchased will be added to the service you accrue while an active member in the System. The additional service will enhance your benefit or, perhaps, allow you to retire sooner than you previously planned.

There are different service credit purchases available to you. Please note, however, that not all non-contributing service is eligible for purchase.

MILITARY VETERANS

Veterans, as that term is defined by Massachusetts law, can purchase up to four years of retirement credit for their active military service. National Guard and Reserve military service is pro-rated on a 5 to 1 basis. For every five years of Guard and Reserve service, a veteran will receive one year of credit.

The cost of this service is 10% of your first-year salary upon entering the retirement system for each year purchased. No interest is charged.

To apply to purchase your prior military service, please complete and return the Notice of Potential Veterans' Benefits Form available on our website.

REFUND REDEPOSITS

If you previously rendered public service as a member of a Massachusetts retirement system, then left your employment and received a refund of your retirement contributions, your prior service credit may be bought back by redepositing the amount of the refund, plus interest to the date of final repayment. The amount of interest you pay will depend upon when the redeposit is made. Your interest rate will be less if repayment is made within one year of your re-entry into service.

To apply for a redeposit, please complete and return the Redeposit Request Form available on our website.

CALL FIREFIGHTERS AND PERMANENT INTERMITTENT/RESERVE POLICE OFFICERS

If you were employed as a call firefighter or permanent-intermittent/reserve police officer, you may receive retirement credit of up to five years for the period of time you were on the municipality's respective list and eligible to be appointed as a permanent firefighter or permanent police officer, depending upon when you were on the list and whether you received compensation.

YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE TO ENHANCE THE AMOUNT OF CREDITABLE SERVICE YOU HAVE ACCRUED BY PURCHASING NON-CONTRIBUTING SERVICE

For call firefighter service, the service is eligible for purchase if you were later appointed as a permanent member of the fire department in the same municipality, or if the municipality has adopted a local option to allow such credit, or in certain other limited circumstances.

OTHER PRIOR NON-CONTRIBUTING SERVICE

Service you rendered in the Middlesex County Retirement System or another retirement system in a temporary, provisional or substitute position is eligible for purchase. Further, service rendered in a part-time, seasonal, or intermittent position in the MCRS is eligible for purchase.

Purchases of prior non-contributing public service rendered outside of our retirement system will be charged a higher interest rate than purchases of non-contributing service rendered to a governmental unit within the Middlesex County Retirement System.

To apply to purchase your service as a call firefighter or permanent intermittent/reserve police officer, or other prior non-contributing service, complete and return to the retirement office the Make Up Request Form available on our website. Our staff will review your request and, if eligible, generate an invoice for you.

Regardless of the type of service you are purchasing, you may rollover funds from deferred compensation accounts or other tax-deferred plans without penalty in order to purchase this time. In addition, installment payment plans are available upon request.

Visit www.middlesexretirement.org/resources/forms-and-retirement-guides

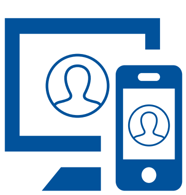
We are here to help!

Each day we receive dozens of requests from our members seeking assistance. We know how important it is to provide you with the information you need to plan for your retirement in a timely manner. Often, we require the assistance of your employers, former employers, or other retirement systems to provide us with additional information we need to assist you. For this reason, some requests may take longer than others to process.

In order to assist you as quickly and efficiently as possible, be sure to complete all forms in their entirety, gather the necessary signatures, provide the requested supporting documentation, and return the forms as directed. We will do the rest!

Request	Processing Time
Creditable Service and Estimate Request Form	4-6 weeks.
Make Up Request Form *(Used to purchase prior non-membership service.)*	Approximately 3-6 months depending on where your prior service was rendered. Be sure to leave plenty of time to purchase your service prior to retirement.
Redeposit Form *(Used to purchase a prior refund.)*	Approximately 1 month if it is a Middlesex County Retirement System refund. Longer if it is from a different retirement system.
Refund Application	60 days. Submit the original application, including the employer section, with a copy of your driver's license.
Superannuation Retirement Application	Submit approximately 3 months in advance of your retirement date to receive a timely payment. Submit the original application with all supporting documentation.

View your account online!



Employee Self-Service provides our members and retirees with the ability to review their account information, generate superannuation retirement estimates, access select forms and income verification letters, and much more. To create an account, navigate to the retirement office website at www.middlesexretirement.org. Under the Resources tab, select the link for Employee Self-Service: Online Account Access and follow the Self-Registration feature. Once you have created an account, we encourage you to bookmark the Log In page for easy access.

One call does it all! If you call the office and need to leave a message, please leave your message with only one staff member to help us avoid duplicating our efforts. Be sure to provide your name, telephone number, and the reason for your call. We will return your call as soon as possible.

MCRS Pension Education Series Understanding Your Public Pension and Social Security

The 2024 Middlesex County Retirement Board's Pension Education Series, Understanding Your Public Pension and Social Security, is underway. The Board held the first of four regional training programs on April 24th at the Ashland Senior Center. Board Chairman Tom Gibson and Chief Administrative Officer Lisa Maloney made a two-hour presentation to our members and their guests. An overview of the retirement system, available benefits, the retirement application process, retirement benefit calculations and payment options, what to expect post-retirement, and how our members' benefits interact with Social Security, were among the topics addressed.

There will be two more live programs and one virtual program to be held in the fall. These free meetings are open to all our members and should be an important part of your financial planning. Although free, pre-registration is required and will open approximately one month prior to each session. You can register through the System's website at www.middlesexretirement.org

The schedule for upcoming meetings is as follows:

Dracut Senior Center
Tuesday, June 18, 2024, 4–6 p.m.

Hudson Town Hall
Tuesday, September 17, 2024, 4–6 p.m.

Virtual Program
November – To Be Scheduled

Small Group Presentation Now Available!

We will also be hosting a smaller group presentation (approximately 20 people) at the retirement office on Tuesday, July 23 at 4 p.m. The same material will be shared. ***To register for the smaller group presentation, please email us at mrs@middlesexretirement.org. Registrations are on a first come, first served basis.***

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