



MARYLAND
STATE RETIREMENT
and PENSION SYSTEM



Pension fund riding out coronavirus storm thanks to diversification, steady management

THE INVESTMENT FUND of the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System has withstood recent market swings better than many other US plans, Chief Investment Officer Andrew C. Palmer reported in April, crediting the fund's well-diversified portfolio and consistent management by the System's Board.

While the economic effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic have roiled Wall Street, the Maryland plan's lower volatility portfolio has set the fund on a better course to weather the storm.

"We're doing better than plans with a larger exposure in the equity markets," said Palmer, who is in his fifth year at the helm of the trust fund. The fund is responsible for helping to pay \$3.7 billion in annual benefits to 165,000 retirees and beneficiaries and generating growth in assets to finance the benefit payments for future retirees. "Starting with the Board's diversified asset allocation, we

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Services, payments continuing during state of emergency

ACCOUNT SERVICES for members of the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System — including retirement counseling, payment of benefits and processing of new retirements — are continuing during the state of emergency declared March 5 by Governor Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr..

The System's Board of Trustees and Investment Division staff also are monitoring and making adjustments to protect the plan's investment fund during this period of market volatility. (See Pension fund, this page.)

Maryland State Retirement Agency staff are taking precautions to ensure the health and safety of plan participants and each other. As this situation evolves, the agency will continue to follow guidance from state and federal authorities.

Services update

While in-person appointments and walk-in counseling sessions have been suspended, other resources are available.

Call

Call 410-625-5555 or toll-free 1-800-492-5909 to speak with a retirement benefits specialist weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Email

Email your questions to sra@sra.state.md.us. Please avoid including personal information, such as your Social Security number.

Mail

Mail completed forms and documents to: Maryland State Retirement Agency, 120 East Baltimore St. Baltimore, MD 21202-6700

In compliance with social distancing guidelines, retirement seminars have been canceled through May. As possible, alternate dates will be determined and posted online at sra.maryland.gov. Persons enrolled in a seminar that has been canceled will be notified.

Online seminars (webinars) are continuing. These educational sessions provide a wealth of valuable information for retirement planning. For a schedule of upcoming webinars and registration information, go to sra.maryland.gov/seminars-and-webinars or click [here](#).

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Hamilton, Stafford, Brandt tapped for Board

THREE FINANCIAL PROFESSIONALS with broad experience in investments and finance were named in February to serve on the Board of Trustees of the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System.

Incumbent Trustees David B. Hamilton and Michael J. Stafford, Jr., and newcomer Thomas M. Brandt were appointed to four-year Board terms by Governor Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.

The 15-member Board is responsible for investment of the pension fund and administration of the Maryland State Retirement Agency.

Trustee Hamilton is Chairman of the Board's Audit and Securities Litigation Committees and is a member of the Investment Committee. He is the Managing Partner of the Baltimore office of Womble

Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, LLP. He helped establish the office in 2007, expanding Womble Carlyle's footprint into Maryland. Mr. Hamilton was appointed Trustee in 2016 after previously serving on the SRPS Board from 2003 to 2007.

Trustee Stafford has served since 2017 on the Board, where he sits on the Investment Committee and Audit and Securities Litigation Committees. Mr. Stafford is Managing Director and Director of Fixed Income Investments for ASB Investment Management and is a member of the ASB Fixed Income Council. He has 30 years of experience in the institutional fixed income business, and previously served as Chief Investment Officer of The St. Paul's (now Travelers) life insurance subsidiary.

Mr. Brandt, a new addition to the Board of Trustees, is a retired corpo-

rate financial professional and board member. He was Chief Financial Officer and a Board member for TeleCommunication Systems, a \$400-million public Annapolis-based wireless communications technology company, from 1997 until its sale to Comtech TeleCommunications in 2016. Mr. Brandt has served on the Boards of Osiris Therapeutics and Antenna Research Associates, and in 2016 was appointed by Gov. Hogan to the Board of Trustees of the Maryland Teachers and State Employees Supplemental Retirement Plans.

More information on the Board of Trustees, including member biographies and open meeting minutes, is available online at sra.maryland.gov.

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decided we didn't want to have too much of our portfolio in any one market. As a result, the fund is in pretty good shape."

Palmer's team of two dozen investment professionals have been working remotely since the beginning of the State of Emergency but have maintained their normal level of teamwork and collaboration.

"Through the end of March the System assets were about \$51.1 billion," Palmer told the plan's Board of Trustees on April 21. "That's down from \$54.2 billion at the end of the fiscal year and down from \$54.8 billion at the end of Feb-

ruary. Fiscal year to date the System is down about 3.5%."

"Our well-balanced portfolio, under the steady leadership of the System Board, has insulated us from some of the more dramatic losses experienced by other plans."

Palmer emphasized that the System's assets have experienced volatile markets in the past and such periods are anticipated in the plan design and method for funding the System.

The Board's Investment Committee will meet again in May to review System assets.

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Monthly benefit payments

There has been no impact to monthly benefit payments. These payments are continuing on time and in the correct amount.

Applying for retirement

The Retirement Agency is focused on first addressing the needs of members who are retiring within the next 60 days. To allow staff to focus on assisting those participants, if you do not plan to retire within the next 60 days, please wait to apply until closer to your retirement date.

Filing deadlines extended amid State of Emergency

TO ASSIST MEMBERS applying for benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System has extended certain filing deadlines. The extended deadlines include the following:

Service Retirement

Effective date of a service retirement allowance and eligibility for unused sick leave credit: If a member separates from employment during the State of Emergency, or separated from employment within 30 days prior to the State of Emergency, the member's submission will be considered timely, and the member therefore may retire on the first day of the month after separation from employment and retain eligibility for any unused sick leave, if the Agency receives the properly completed retirement application on or before 30 days after the Emergency expires.

Changes of optional form of allowance: If a member retires during the State of Emergency, then the deadline to submit a written request to change the member's election of an optional form of allowance is extended until the later of the date the first payment becomes due, or 30 days after the State of Emergency expires.

Disability Retirement

Accepting an award: If the 120-day time period to accept an award of a disability retirement falls in whole or in part within the time period of the State of Emergency, then the deadline to accept the disability retirement, by properly completing and submitting the application to the

Agency, is extended until the later of 120 days of the date of the written notice of the Disability Unit, or 30 days after the State of Emergency expires.

Diligently pursuing a disability claim: If the 45-day period to respond to a request for records or information from the Agency in connection with a disability claim falls in whole or in part within the State of Emergency, then the deadline to respond to a request for information or documentation is extended until the later of 45 days of the date of the request or 30 days after the State of Emergency expires.

Requests for reconsideration: If the 30-day period to request reconsideration of the medical board's recommendation falls in whole or in part within the time period of the State of Emergency, then the deadline to request reconsideration is extended until 30 days after the State of Emergency expires.

Appeal of denial of a disability claim: If the 30-day time period to appeal the denial of a disability claim falls in whole or in part within the State of Emergency, then the deadline to request an appeal is extended until 30 days after the Emergency expires.

Acceptance of a disability application from a surviving beneficiary: In the event of the death of a member

during the State of Emergency, the member's surviving beneficiary may submit a preliminary application for disability retirement or application for disability retirement that was signed and dated by the deceased member within 30 days of the date of death, if the application is submitted on or before 30 days after the Emergency expires.

The System's Board of Trustees issued the new deadlines on March 30. They follow Governor Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.'s, executive order authorizing extensions of certain time requirements during the State of Emergency he declared earlier in the month.

To view the Board of Trustees' Notice Extending Certain Time Requirements, click [here](#).

Visit the Maryland State Retirement Agency [online!](#)

sra.maryland.gov



The 2020 Census is Here! Did you know...

The Census is important for funding programs such as:

- Healthcare, including vaccines and emergency services
- Medicare and Medicaid
- Programs for families in need

Fill out your Census online, by phone, or by mail

To complete your Census visit 2020census.gov or call 1-844-330-2020



sra.maryland.gov



Legislation will cap contributions for eligible police

THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY this year passed legislation to limit member contributions for eligible members of two police plans.

House Bill 588 and Senate Bill 587 provide that once an active member of the State Police Retirement System or Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System accrue the years of service necessary to receive the maximum available benefit, the member will cease making member contributions to the plan.

Current law limits the maximum benefit for a retired State Trooper to 71.4% of his or her average final compensation after 28 years of service. For members of LEOPS, the maximum benefit is 65% of the member's AFC after 32.5 years of service.

Frequently asked pension questions

Q. Do I need to update my beneficiaries on file with the Retirement Agency?

A. Since you enrolled in the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System have you experienced a marriage, divorce, death of a loved one or the addition of a new family member? If so, you may wish to update your beneficiary designation. Submit a new *Designation of Beneficiary* (Form 4) to the Retirement Agency.

Q. How can I protect my pension during a leave of absence?

A. Before beginning an unpaid leave of absence granted by your employer, be sure to first submit a *Qualified Leave of Absence Request OR Notification of Military Service Entry* (Form 46).

Qualified leave of absence status preserves the rights of your beneficiaries to valuable active employee death benefits in the event of your demise. It also preserves any right you may have to obtain credit for the leave period.

By law, the Maryland State Retirement Agency recognizes leaves of absence *only* if taken for personal illness, birth or legal adoption, government sponsored and/or subsidized employment, or study.

Q. To whom should I submit Retirement Agency forms?

A. Retirement Agency forms such as *Designation of Beneficiary* (Form 4),

Statement of Disability (Form 20) and *Election to Transfer Service* (Form 37) are not effective until they are received in Retirement Agency offices in Baltimore.

A completed form received by your employer, *but not forwarded to the Retirement Agency*, is not valid.

Some Retirement Agency forms also require notarization, as indicated in the form's printed instructions. Forms submitted without proper notarization are not valid and will be returned for completion.

Mail completed forms to the Maryland State Retirement Agency, 120 East Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21202-6700.

Q. What is the purpose of the barcode on Retirement Agency forms?

A. To help process your submitted forms more quickly, barcodes have been added to all Retirement Agency forms. The barcode is scanned to identify the form upon receipt at Retirement Agency offices in Baltimore. Before completing a Form 9, Form 46 or any other Retirement Agency form, please be sure it displays a barcode somewhere on the form.

If a Retirement Agency form does not have a barcode, it is out of date and processing may be delayed. Old forms also may contain outdated information. Up-to-date forms are available at sra.maryland.gov.

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