Vote by April 14 in the ERS Board of Trustees election

Use your right to vote

We know you value your benefits and want to have a voice in any benefits changes. The Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) Board of Trustees election is one way to use your voice. As with any election, voter turnout is important. In recent trustee elections, fewer than 12% of eligible members and retirees voted. This is your opportunity to vote for a Board member who will serve as your advocate over a six-year term.

Individuals can vote in the election if they are:
• current ERS members as of January 31, 2017, or
• retired state employees who get annuities from ERS.

The candidates for this election, in ballot order, are:
• Catherine A. Melvin, Texas Department of Public Safety
• Morgen Ashley Cuming, Texas Board of Professional Engineers
• Benito Ybarra, Texas Department of Transportation
• Jacqueline “Jackie” A. Dickerson, Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Voting options

In March 2017, a paper ballot and the election newsletter were mailed through the U.S. Postal Service. This year, ERS is also offering a new voting option by direct email. Through a personalized link sent by email, a voter can cast a secure ballot electronically without entering his or her member number. This new option is available to every eligible member or retiree with an updated and active email address on file with ERS.

Voting begins March 10. You can vote using the ERS website, the direct email sent to you or the paper ballot you got in the mail. To vote through the ERS website, you will need the last four digits of your Social Security number and your 11-digit ERS Employee ID, which is printed in the lower left-hand corner of the ballot. You can also find your Employee ID by logging into your account on the ERS website (located under Account Balance Summary or Beneficiary Summary). Voting online or by email helps ERS save money by lowering postage costs.

Do not submit a vote online AND by paper or direct email ballot—if duplicate votes are received, only the first ballot received will count. Paper ballots must be postmarked on or before April 14, 2017 and received by April 21, 2017. The candidate receiving the most votes will serve as the new Board of Trustees member from September 1, 2017 to August 31, 2023.

Why vote?
The Board of Trustees’ role

The Board of Trustees oversees the ERS Retirement Trust Fund, the Texas Employees Group Benefits Program (GBP) and other benefits for state agencies and higher education employees and retirees. Ensuring that state employee benefits are competitive and reasonably priced is a Board priority. Retirement and health benefits help enhance the lives of State of Texas employees and retirees.

Over the past two years, the Board approved and provided guidance on:
• investment of the $25.6 billion retirement fund,
• the new State of Texas Vision plan, in which more than 62,000 members enrolled,
• Consumer Directed HealthSelectSM, the new high-deductible health plan with health savings account,
• new pharmacy benefit managers projected to save the GBP almost $1 billion over the six-year contract term,
• selection of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas as the new third-party administrator for the HealthSelectSM of Texas and Consumer Directed HealthSelect plans, under a contract projected to save $1.1 billion over its six-year term, and
• improvements to the Texa$averSM 401(k) / 457 Program for personal retirement savings.

Trustee appointments and terms

The term of Trustee Brian Ragland will expire on August 31, 2017. Mr. Ragland holds one of three seats elected by ERS members and retirees. Three other Board members are appointed: one each by the Governor, the Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives and the Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

Both appointed and elected Board members serve staggered six-year terms. The terms of appointees expire on August 31 of each even-numbered year. The terms of elected Board members expire on August 31 of each odd-numbered year.

Key dates in the 2017 election calendar

• Thursday, March 9 – Candidate forum – If you missed the forum, you can watch a recording on the ERS election webpage.
• Friday, March 10 – Voting began
• Friday, April 14 – Voting ends
• Wednesday, May 10 – Results certified
• Friday, September 1 – Board of Trustees member term begins

See more election information on ERS’ election webpage.
Executive Director’s Corner
Porter Wilson

Here at the Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS), we know how important your retirement and health benefits are to you. Providing quality benefits programs and outstanding service to state employees, retirees and their families is our top goal every day.

More than 350 ERS employees work in different ways to achieve that goal. There’s a lot that goes into managing your benefits:

• Investing state and member contributions to help make sure retirement and health insurance are maintained,
• Educating lawmakers and stakeholders about the importance of state employee benefits,
• Interpreting laws and writing ERS policy,
• Designing and overseeing the programs,
• Paying annuities and claims,
• Contracting with third-party administrators to allow for competitive coverage and reasonable costs,
• Building and maintaining technology that helps us administer the programs and communicate with our members,
• Educating you about your benefits,
• Supporting the ERS employees who support you,
• And so much more

The ERS employees you probably have the most contact with are those in our Customer Benefits Division. They’re the ones who answer your calls and emails, and often are the first to let the rest of us know when there are issues with the benefits programs. It can be a very satisfying job. But it also can be challenging, and sometimes thankless. These front-line employees have to be part researcher, part social worker, and part tech support – often all in a single phone call. Last year, the ERS Contact Center received more than 400,000 calls, visits and emails from our members. I want to give special recognition to these ERS team members who support members like you so well.

We hope you’ll keep us in mind when you check your bank account for your annuity deposit or read your yearly enrollment packet. A lot of people put a great deal of work into them.

We like to hear from you. It’s one of the best parts of my job. We rely on you to let us know how the benefits programs are working for you.

The ERS team is as diverse as the population we serve. We come from different backgrounds and help our members in different ways. But we work together every day to bring the best possible benefits and service to State of Texas employees, retirees and their families.

I’m proud of the ERS team. On behalf of all of us here at ERS, thank you for letting us serve you.

Sincerely,
Porter Wilson

New ERS website design and address

New domain name

The Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) will have a new online domain name. We are planning to make the change in late-August 2017. That means our website address will change to www.ers.texas.gov (from www.ers.state.tx.us) and email addresses will end with “@ers.texas.gov” (instead of the current “@ers.state.tx.us”). If you visit our website or email us often, you might be in the habit of using our current domain name. To help people with the change, we’ll automatically redirect web traffic and emails from the current domain name to the new one. So, if you type in www.ers.state.tx.us after late August, you’ll automatically go to the website at www.ers.texas.gov. If you send an email to a current “@ers.state.tx.us” address, it will automatically go to the new “@ers.texas.gov.”

We’re changing the domain name to be consistent with other state agencies. Because texas.gov is exclusive to government use, you can be confident you are using an official Texas government website.

We suggest that you update your email spam filters with the new address to ensure that you continue to receive ERS news and updates.

Website redesign

At the same time we change the domain name, ERS also will launch a redesigned website. Information about your benefits, including health insurance and retirement, will be reorganized to make it easier to find and understand.

We hope you’ll agree the look and feel of the new website is more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

Stay posted!

More information about the upcoming changes will be available soon on the ERS website.
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas to become HealthSelect plan administrator

On September 1, 2017, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) will become the plan administrator for HealthSelectSM of Texas and Consumer Directed HealthSelectSM. Throughout the spring and summer leading up to the change, we will give regular updates. This information will also be posted on the ERS website.

Note: This change to BCBSTX will not affect HealthSelect Medicare Advantage members.

Here are answers to some basic questions you may have:

1. Why is ERS making this change?
ERS periodically rebids our contracts including the HealthSelect third-party administrator (TPA), as required by law, on a regular basis. Repricing the contract helps ERS make sure health plan participants and the State of Texas are getting the best possible value and service.

The ERS Board of Trustees awarded the HealthSelect TPA contract to UnitedHealthcare, the current TPA, in 2012. BCBSTX served as the administrator previously.

Contract savings through these re-bidding opportunities have helped the state maintain your benefits despite rising health care costs.

2. When will this change happen?
BCBSTX will begin services on September 1, 2017. Until then, UnitedHealthcare will continue to serve as the administrator for HealthSelect and Consumer Directed HealthSelect.

3. Will my rates or out-of-pocket costs change?
The change in plan administrators does not directly affect rates or out-of-pocket costs like copays and coinsurance.

ERS manages the contract and sets rates, eligibility and enrollment for all the health plans in the Texas Employees Group Benefits Program. ERS also sets the plan design, including copays, coinsurance and deductibles.

Rates could change when the new plan year starts on September 1, 2017. If they do, it will be because of state funding changes, rising health costs or other factors – not the new TPA.

4. Will my current network doctor(s) be part of the BCBSTX HealthSelect network?
Most primary care physicians and other current providers will be in the BCBSTX HealthSelect network.

5. Where can I find out if my doctor(s) will be in the BCBSTX HealthSelect network?
By late May 2017, a provider search tool and contact information will be posted on a BCBSTX website. You will be able to look for your provider using the search tool or contact BCBSTX to find out if your doctor will be in the network.

6. Will this TPA change affect the HealthSelect Medicare Advantage Plan?
No, HealthSelect Medicare Advantage will continue to be administered by Humana.

7. What if my doctor is no longer in the HealthSelect network? Will I still be able to see him or her?
Yes, you can see a non-network provider. However, you will have to pay higher out-of-pocket costs, including an out-of-network deductible in HealthSelect of Texas or a higher deductible in Consumer Directed HealthSelect. It costs much less to see a provider who is in the HealthSelect network.

Beginning in late May 2017, you will be able to call BCBSTX if you need assistance in finding a new provider who is in the network.

For more information, see the HealthSelect TPA Transition FAQ on the ERS website.

Special invitation to DPS retirees

The Texas Department of Public Safety Historical Museum & Research Center invites current and retired Texas Department of Public Safety personnel to sign up to receive information about upcoming museum events.

To be added to the mailing list, send an email to DPSMuseum@gmail.com or call (512) 265-1470 and leave a message. If you leave a voice message, please spell your name and provide a current email or mailing address.

This tax season, found money is good money

At least $2.5 million in missing money is waiting to be claimed by 12,000 retired state employees. It takes 30 seconds to search the official state database. Go to ClaimItTexas.org to find out if you have unclaimed funds!

Note: Please use the link provided above to ensure that you’re going to the official site managed by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.
Discount Purchase ProgramSM

Are you taking full advantage of your Discount Purchase Program? Save on in-office and online tax preparation from H&R Block and rest easy knowing your taxes are in the hands of experts. Refresh your wardrobe with Brooks Brothers, where you can save 15% on regularly priced merchandise at stores, by phone and online. Visit Discount Purchase Program to see these deals and more!

Moving?

Be sure to notify ERS to update your address and other contact information. ERS needs to have current information on file so you can receive information about your coverage and other important documents.

Annuity payment dates:

- March 31, 2017
- May 31, 2017
- April 28, 2017
- June 30, 2017

Direct-deposit annuities are deposited in your account on the last business day of each month. Paper checks are mailed on the second-to-last business day of the month.

TRS retirees, please contact TRS for information on your annuity payment dates.

Medicare Preparation Seminar

Are you prepared for Medicare?

Attend a Medicare Preparation seminar and learn about Medicare and how it works with your Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) benefits. ERS gets many questions from members nearing Medicare eligibility, and we want to answer yours. Visit the ERS events calendar to register.