

## ORTA's Efforts to Restore COLA

At every Local Chapter meeting that I attend it seems the issue of COLA comes up. Of course, this is understandable as this issue is central to all STRS retiree's future. ORTA has focused our efforts on a few areas associated with the loss of COLA for STRS beneficiaries:

First and foremost, ORTA opposed the move by STRS to eliminate the COLA provision. ORTA, along with other groups that opposed this strategy to stabilize our pension system. On several occasions, ORTA board members spoke at STRS public meetings urging the STRS Board of Trustees not to eliminate Cost of Living Adjustments to our pensions. In a small sense, ORTA was successful. The STRS decided to 'suspend' COLA as opposed to 'eliminate' COLA. This decision, although to many retirees was not enough, did keep the possibility for future increases in pension benefits.

Second, ORTA has worked with the leaders at STRS to develop a 'pathway to COLA'. ORTA seeks to understand the conditions that must be present for STRS to increase pension benefits at a future date. STRS Executive Director has met with ORTA to discuss what must happen within the STRS system for COLAs to be granted. ORTA has been promised that such a pathway will be developed so that retirees can monitor this for themselves and stay abreast of where the pension system stands.

Recently, ORTA has offered public comments at STRS Board of Trustee meetings (April, June, September) urging STRS to share in the sacrifice that STRS stakeholders (active teachers and retirees) are feeling. It seems unfair that:

- active members are forced to work longer and contribute at a higher rate
- retirees have had their promised COLA suspended

while STRS employees continue to enjoy pay increases and lucrative incentive pay packages.

ORTA has worked with other groups to advance the fight for COLA. The Ohio STRS Members Only Facebook Forum is one group that has been vocal in the fight to restore COLA. This group has an online petition ([restoreourcola.com](http://restoreourcola.com)) that has 15,000 signatures. ORTA often posts messages on this facebook page.

Finally, ORTA has co-authored a letter sent to all Ohio legislators in Columbus. The letter contains factual information regarding the STRS system and what the loss of COLA means to retirees. The intent of the letter is to inform all legislators at the Statehouse of the impact of the loss of COLA to retirees.

ORTA will continue to speak out on COLA and other matters of importance to our members such as efforts in the US Congress to weaken our pensions. ORTA members can also engage in this effort in several ways:

1. ORTA members can encourage other retirees to join ORTA. Our voice is only as strong as our membership.

2. ORTA members are encouraged to review the petition created by retirees at [restoreourcola.com](http://restoreourcola.com) and sign if they feel compelled to do so.
3. ORTA members can stay connected to this issue through social media. Follow ORTA on Facebook, check out ORTA's website at [www.orta.com](http://www.orta.com) or join the STRS Members Only Facebook

STRS retirees are a resilient and patient group. We understand the battle we face is a hard one. But, as we all know, ***Educators are used to hard battles, we will persevere.***