

# Legislative Update

State Representative Patrick Flannery



## Teacher retirement fund continues to receive legislature's attention

The Kentucky General Assembly has taken significant steps in recent years to strengthen the financial health and sustainability of the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS), ensuring long-term security for the state's educators and financial accountability for taxpayers. Similar to our budget philosophy and our overall approach to legislation, we have worked to replace outdated and broken policies with a more responsible, intentional approach based on the simple principal that we are stewards of taxpayer resources.

\$17.82 Billion Unfunded Liability: In 2016, TRS's funded ratio (the ratio of assets to liabilities) was around 55%, meaning the system had only 55 cents for every dollar it owed in pension benefits. This liability grew over decades due to several factors, including inadequate contributions by the state legislature; unrealistic actuarial

assumptions; and investment performance not meeting expectations. In the seven years since 2016, lawmakers have provided billions in additional funding and passed policies aimed at strengthening oversight and ensuring that the TRS remains a priority. At the same time, in June 2021, the TRS adopted revised more realistic benefit estimates (referred to as actuarial assumptions) that increased its unfunded liability by approximately \$3 billion.

As of June 30, 2024, the Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) reported a funded ratio of 59.1% and an unfunded liability of \$17.82 billion. While a modest improvement from the 2016 funded ratio of 55%, it is particularly important to recognize that we made real progress even with the additional \$3 billion in unfunded liability identified by the TRS.

More than \$12.8 billion in funding since 2017: Recently, the legislature has funded TRS above and beyond what

was required by law. This was a strategic decision and part of our philosophy of funding the state's needs rather than feeding political wants. Since 2017, lawmakers have allocated more than \$12.8 billion towards TRS. The 2024-2026 biennial budget alone includes more than \$1.75 billion to meet the actuarially required contributions for the TRS Retirement Annuity Trust. Additionally, the legislature approved \$80 million in one-time appropriations from the state's budget reserve fund to further reduce the system's unfunded liabilities (HB 1/2024RS).

Enacting responsible policies: Beyond budgetary allocations, the General Assembly has enacted legislation aimed at improving TRS's structural integrity. Senate Bill 9 seeks to standardize benefits across school districts and enhance transparency in how sick leave impacts pensions. The bill establishes uniform maternity leave policies, modifies pension calculations for sick

leave, and increases accountability within TRS operations.

In addition to allocating funding for the teacher's retirement system, the state also provides funding to help cover the cost of health insurance for retired teachers who are not eligible for Medicare. This dates back to a law passed in 2010 that requires active teachers to pay 3.75% of their salary, retired teachers under 65 to pay the equivalent of the monthly cost of Medicare Part B, and school districts to contribute 3% of their gross payroll. The state portion, paid to the TRS and earmarked for the Medical Insurance Fund, is .75% of annual payroll. Until recently, lawmakers provided annual funding based on estimates provided by the fund. However, those estimates were regularly higher than the actual cost, with the fund retaining the leftover

money at the end of each fiscal year. Today, the legislature continues to fully fund its portion of the cost, but requires the fund to spend all of a previous year's funding before drawing down additional dollars. The Medical Insurance Fund will soon be fully funded and potentially provide an opportunity to use portions of that funding to further shore up the retirement fund.

This session, we passed HB 694, legislation that creates a default position by redirecting employer contributions from the Medical Insurance Fund to the pension fund once the retiree health fund reaches a 100% funding level. Contributions would revert to the health fund until full funding is restored if it falls below 95%. By creating a default position, this measure allows for future discussions on the issue while still ensuring the retirement system - and the

people who depend on their retirement benefits - remain a priority.

Through consistent full funding, strategic legislative reforms, and adherence to responsible budgeting, the Kentucky General Assembly has demonstrated a strong commitment to the sustainability and reliability of the Teachers' Retirement System. These efforts aim to provide Kentucky educators with the financial security they deserve in retirement, as well as to uphold our responsibility to all taxpayers - including those who participate in TRS.

As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Richard.White@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legis.lature.ky.gov.

## Poetry from our readers

### Emma's Poems

Emma Rosetta Liles  
(Rickman)  
1933 - 2005

Transcribed by Robert Liles  
Remembering Emma Liles (1933-2005), a life that began on June 23, 1933, in Garrison, Lewis County, Kentucky. Born to Robert Wilson Liles and Gertrude Louella Lambert, Emma's early years were shaped by the simplicity and challenges of rural life. She grew up in a log cabin with dirt floors and no indoor plumbing, across the road from Kinniconick Creek. A family with three sisters and a brother. The experiences of the 1930s and 1940s in Kinniconick played a significant role in her formative years. Her poems reflect a life that is now so foreign.

### Country Girl

By Emma Liles

I'm a Country Girl and Proud of it.

There isn't any thing I Couldn't do for you  
I can split the logs,  
Slop the hogs and milk a cow  
Plow the garden; yes I know how  
I can ride a horse, go at a trot  
I can take the heat when the weather gets hot  
I can cook a meal  
Inside the house and out yes I can do a great deal  
Give me jeans, boots and a cowboy hat  
I don't care for fancy things like furs and that  
I am simple, I am plain but I can do most any thing  
I'm a Country Girl and Proud of it.

### Growing Up

By Emma Liles

Daddy's trimmin the branches from the tree  
Brother's out in the barn milkin' the cow  
Sister, she's playin' in the warm breeze  
Me, I'm cookin' our beans

with pork  
Soon it's time for the plates and the forks.  
Now daddy cuts the taters to plant  
Sister's watchin' an army of ants  
Brother's whittlin' on a stick and me, I'm thinkin' up a new trick  
I like words, stories and such and our daddy, he liked riddles so much.  
Brother's out playin' ball with ole Jess  
and sister she's dreamin' of a new dress  
Bed time already, it's gettin' dark  
Kittens are mewin' and ole

Bess is goin' to bark  
Sister's washing up for bed  
Brother's lookin' down the road for Fred.  
Daddy's singin' out on the porch  
Me, I'm thinkin' about tomorrow's wash  
Such were the ways of long ago  
times were hard but we kids didn't know.  
Our water was in the well the out house was behind a hill  
no electricity, no radios, no telephone  
we didn't need too much  
Because there was love in our home.

## Cemetery Notices

### Liles Cemetery

Notice to the people who have loved ones buried at the Liles Cemetery in Camp Dix, KY. It is that time of the year that we need all the help we can get for the upkeep of the cemetery. Jay Stafford greatly appreciates each and every donation that he received last year. This spring he painted the fence post. Richie Cooper donated a new flag pole that he and Jay installed. Please send all donations to Jay Stafford, 364 McCartney Bend, Vanceburg, KY 41179.

### Laurel Point Cemetery

Once again it is that time of year to begin mowing the cemetery. I want to thank each one that has made donations in the past. Please send donations to Laurel Point Cemetery, c/o Carolyn Butler, 140 Norman Lane, Vanceburg, KY 41179 or you may call 606-796-2471. Thank you.

### Evans Cemetery, Slate Point

Notice to the people who have family buried in the Evans Cemetery on Slate Point. It is that time of the year when we need donations to help with the upkeep of the cemetery. Any and all donations would be appreciated. Thank you. Please send donations to: Joseph D. Evans, 754 Hackette Ridge Rd., Brooksville, KY 41004.

### McEldowney Cemetery

Donations are needed for the upkeep of the McEldowney Cemetery. Please be a part of keeping the cemetery mowed and looking nice.

Donations will be taken at the cemetery Memorial weekend or you can mail donations to: Ruby Rayburn, 8102 KY 344, Vanceburg, KY 41179; Kathy Kegley, 6843 KY 344, Vanceburg, KY 41179; or Judy (Kegley) Sparks, 7830 KY 344, Vanceburg, KY 41179.

Thank you everyone that donates to keep our loved ones graves looking nice. As you place flowers on the graves please take the time to honor them by donating to keep it mowed.

### Memorial Day Remembering All

We at Salem Community Church on Road 984 (Little Cabin Creek) would like to invite you to help this year in a special occasion.

Last year we decided to do something different for Memorial Day at the Church. We decided to put a bunch of flowers on every grave that didn't have flowers. We are asking you if you would like to be a part of this year.

Some of the graves in our cemetery date back to the 1800's so no family is left to put flowers on them. We feel that everyone should be remembered and are happy to be able to do this for them.

If you would like to give for this occasion you can send donations to: Salem Community Church, 12716 KY 57, Tollesboro, KY 41189. We would greatly appreciate it and if you want to send for help in maintaining the cemetery you can send it to the same address as well. Just mark on your check for which one it's for. We did 218 graves last year so again your help is appreciated, and I know you will be blessed for your donation.

### Cooper Willis Cemetery Cleanup

Cooper Willis Cemetery Cleanup will be Sunday, May 18, at 1:00 p.m. If you have loved ones buried here, you need to make a donation for the upkeep. With the high gas prices, we need all the donations we can get. You can mail your donation to Lee Ann Clark, 262 Church Street, Garrison, KY 41141, or you can give her your donation on cleanup day.

### Richardson Cemetery

Notice to the people who have family buried in the Richardson Cemetery. It is that time of year again when we need donations to help with the upkeep of the cemetery. These donations help with the mowing and trimming of the cemetery. It takes donations from you and your family members that keep it mowed from year to year. If you would like to donate, you can mail it to: Cora May, 649 Skidmore Ln., Garrison, KY 41141.

### Skidmore Cemetery

Notice to the people who have family buried in the Skidmore Cemetery. It is that time of year again when we need donations to help with the upkeep of the cemetery. These donations help with the mowing and trimming of the cemetery. It takes donations from you and your family members that keep it mowed from year to year.

If you would like to donate, you can mail it to: Cora May, 649 Skidmore Lane, Garrison, KY 41141 or Betty Bloomfield, 16 Skidmore Spur, Garrison, KY 41141.

Skidmore Cemetery has grown so large it has become a problem for our mowers to mow with all the things that are being placed on top of the graves, so we are asking that you do not place any glassware, what nots, solar lights, flags, or fencing on top of the graves. These items make it difficult to mow and is dangerous at times. If there are items on the grave tops those graves can't be mowed and the mowers can't get to the grave around those that are in these areas.

We are asking you to place flowers on top of the headstones or vases. Some ideas to keep your saddles in place are to use fish string to tie them on with or use a small amount of clear caulking on the legs of the saddles. We realize that we all have our own way of honoring our loved ones, but we are just trying to keep the cemetery looking good.

If you place flowers or any other items on top of the graves, we are asking that they be removed two weeks after Memorial Day. That way the mower will have a clean path for mowing. Also, please remember to take your old flowers away with you, we do not have trash service at the cemetery.

We apologize for any inconvenience. But we are just trying to keep the cemetery looking good.

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### COMMUNITY EVENTS

**WIC WANTS YOU!** - WIC offers health care and free healthy foods for eligible women and children under age 5. Call the Lewis County Health Department to find out if you qualify. Ex. of WIC Program Income Guidelines: A family of 4 can make up to \$57,720 annually. Call today 606-796-2632.

**LEWIS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY** - Will meet the third Saturday of each month at Noon at the Historical Society building on Market Street, Vanceburg.

**BENCHMARK FAMILY SERVICES** - Benchmark Family Services is taking applications for foster parenting. As the largest private foster care agency in the state of Kentucky, we are able to provide our foster parents with an unmatched level of training, support, and financial reimbursement. To learn more about becoming a foster parent, please call 606-783-0268 or go to [www.benchmarkfs.org](http://www.benchmarkfs.org).