



Montana Teachers' Retirement System
1500 E. Sixth Ave.
PO Box 200139
Helena, MT 59620-0139

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
HELENA, MT
PERMIT NO. 89

Horizons

Montana Teachers' Retirement System Newsletter Volume 11 | Issue 1
Spring/Summer 2017

In this issue

- Update on the 2017 Montana Legislative Session 2
- 'My TRS' Online Account System 3
- M-Trust System Upgrade Project 3
- TRS Staff Updates 4
- Make Sure TRS Has Your Current Mailing Address 4

Four Bills in the 2017 Legislature Affect TRS

The 65th Montana Legislature, which adjourned at the end of April, resulted in positive changes for the retirement system. The four bills summarized below become law on July 1, 2017 and will affect TRS members, employers, and benefit recipients.

House Bill 67, TRS’s “housekeeping bill,” clarified several sections of existing TRS law. Most importantly, this bill:

- Defines “extra duty service” and provides a statutory framework for calculating the amount of service credit earned by TRS members who perform extra duty service as part of their jobs.
- Clarifies that TRS members may purchase service credit for “in-service leave,” such as for periods of maternity leave and other job-protected leave.
- Simplifies the process by which TRS employers report fringe benefits converted to cash.
- Clarifies that if a disabled TRS retiree returns to work in a TRS-reportable position, the discontinuation of retirement benefits is based on actual earnings, not on full-time employment status.

House Bill 68 was introduced at the request of the TRS board to clarify the retirement plan participation options available to certain individuals hired by the Montana University System (MUS) or the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE). New hires of MUS or OCHE must enroll in the MUS Retirement Plan (MUS-RP) unless they are already eligible for membership in another retirement system.

Some new hires come to MUS or OCHE with prior service in *both* the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS) and the Public Employees’ Retirement System (PERS) and a previous loophole in the law allowed these individuals to choose either TRS or PERS in lieu of electing to participate in the MUS-RP. House Bill 68 clarified that employees’ retirement plan options are based on the duties and functions of the positions into which they are hired. For example, if the employee’s position is reportable to PERS, that individual may not elect to remain an active member of TRS.

TIP

To view the full text of any bill, visit the Montana Legislature’s LAWS website. Go to leg.mt.gov and click the 2017 LAWS button. Then select “Look Up Bill Information.”

Senate Bill 115 amended 20-4-134, MCA, a law that provides state funding for professional stipends for national board-certified teachers. The bill increased the amount and frequency of these stipends and also specified that the stipends do not constitute earned compensation, as long as they are paid pursuant to the provisions of the law.

Senate Bill 121 established a definition for a “bona fide volunteer position” and removed obstacles that otherwise may have prevented a TRS retiree from providing service in such a position. The employer must comply with certain restrictions; for example, the volunteer role must not have been a paid position in the previous 12 months and may not become a paid position in the 12 months following its designation as a bona fide volunteer position. TRS will require employers to certify that a volunteer position meets the legal definition.

Visit trs.mt.gov for more information about these legislative changes.

EXECUTIVE STAFF

Executive Director
Shawn Graham

Deputy Executive Director
Tammy Rau

Chief Legal Counsel
Denise Pizzini

Communication Specialist
Darla Fitzpatrick

Executive Secretary
Shannon Buswell

Have You Tried 'My TRS'?

TRS online account system provides secure access to view your member account

TRS launched its new online account system, called My TRS, in September 2016. Its modern, user-friendly design makes it easier than ever to log in and review your account, and its enhanced security features keep your private information safe.

If you are an active (or inactive) TRS member, My TRS allows you to:

- Review and update your mailing address, telephone number, and email address
- See your current beneficiary designations and get the forms required to update them
- Review your account balance, contribution history, service history, and other account details
- Create an estimate of benefits based on a hypothetical retirement date
- Print an account balance letter for personal use, such as for a loan application
- View your most recent annual statement

If you receive a monthly TRS benefit, you may:

- Review your mailing address, telephone number, and email address (See "Do We Have Your Current Mailing Address?" on Page 4.)
- Review your beneficiary designations or your Joint Annuitant, along with instructions for contacting TRS when changes are needed
- See your current monthly benefit amount and the amount of taxes withheld from your benefit each month
- View your benefit history
- View or print any IRS 1099-R forms previously mailed to you
- Confirm the amount you have earned as a working retiree, if applicable
- Print a benefit verification letter for personal use, such as for a loan application

For a detailed description of My TRS, please visit our website (trs.mt.gov). Depending on your status, you will click either the Active Members button or the Retirees & Benefit Recipients button on the left side of the screen. On the screen that follows, read the Online Account Access section for information about accessing My TRS. You can also view an online demonstration (tutorial) that illustrates all the system's features.

Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future.

— WALT DISNEY

Three Cheers for M-Trust!

TRS implements new pension administration system

In 2013, TRS embarked on an ambitious technology upgrade project for its pension administration system. The new system, called M-Trust, began with a pilot project in 2013.

The pilot, called Phase 1, demonstrated that a new system was feasible and cost-effective. In Phase 2, the team replicated all functions of the old system on the M-Trust platform, rolled out new web-based reporting tools for TRS employers, and launched My TRS, the online account system (see above). Thanks to outstanding teamwork and commitment to quality, Phase 2 was completed successfully – and under budget – in December 2016.

The TRS board has authorized additional work to further enhance M-Trust's capabilities. Phase 3, scheduled for completion in the fall of 2018, will allow TRS to manage member data and accounts accurately and efficiently for many years to come.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STAFF

IT Manager

John Noble

Staff

Rex Merrick

Jeanie Schmidt

Dave Rau

ACCOUNTING STAFF

Fiscal Manager

Nolan Brilz

Staff

Joyce Love

Kim Lloyd



1500 E. Sixth Ave.
PO Box 200139
Helena, MT
59620-0139

(406) 444-3134
(866) 600-4045
trsoutreach@mt.gov

**SPRING/
SUMMER 2017**
Volume 11,
Issue 1

*Horizons is
published
biannually
by TRS*

Save a tree!
Subscribe to the
TRS Horizons
'eNewsletter.'
Go to
trs.mt.gov and
click on the
MailChimp icon.



TRS Staff Updates

*New employees, promotions,
and a retirement*

Lori Hultin, who joined TRS in November 2016 as Executive Secretary, recently was promoted to Retired Payroll Technician.

Darla Fitzpatrick, the technical writer for TRS’s M-Trust project, was hired as Communication Specialist in January 2017.

Jessie Hill, our newest Benefits Officer, came to TRS in February 2017 after nearly 12 years with the Student Assistance Foundation.

Dave Rau joined TRS as an Administrative Support and Quality Control Technician in April 2017.

Shannon Buswell, TRS’s new Executive Secretary, joined the team in May 2017.

Karla Scharf, Retired Payroll Supervisor, has announced she will retire effective July 31, 2017 after more than 36 years of outstanding service to TRS. We wish her happiness and health in the next phase of her life.

Natalie Chamberlain, a 13-year TRS employee, has been promoted and will replace Karla as Retired Payroll supervisor.

**Does TRS Have Your
Current Mailing Address?**

TRS mails many letters, forms, and other documents to both active members and benefit recipients.

Mail sent to benefit recipients may include IRS 1099-R forms, checks, direct deposit stubs, and other items containing personal financial information. To reduce the risk of lost mail or identity theft, TRS normally does not allow benefit recipients’ mail to be forwarded. However, because this newsletter contains only general information, we have allowed the U.S. Postal Service to forward it to those who receive it by regular mail.

If you received this newsletter by regular mail with a forwarding label, it means TRS does not have your current mailing address. **When you move, it is your responsibility to notify us.** Please follow the instructions below.

If you receive a monthly benefit from TRS:

Benefit recipients must submit address changes in writing. Please call toll-free (866-600-4045) to request a Change of Mailing Address form. Or, if you have access to the internet and a printer, you can print it from our website:

1. Visit trs.mt.gov
2. Click the “Forms” link on the right-hand side of the screen
3. Under the heading “Retired Member and Benefit Recipient Forms,” find *Form 116 Change of Mailing Address*.

If you are an active (or inactive) TRS member who does not receive a monthly benefit: You can update your address online using My TRS, the online member account system. See Page 3 for more information about My TRS.

**ACTIVE
MEMBER
STAFF**

**Johnelle
Sedlock**

**Brynn
Dennehy**

**Jessie
Hill**

**Cathy
Page**

**Sandra
Donahue**

**RETIRED
PAYROLL
STAFF**

**Karla
Scharf**

**Natalie
Chamberlain**

**Chris
Fish**

**Lori
Hultin**