



MCREA

Montgomery County Retired
Employees' Association, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

May 2022

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND MCREA'S TWO 2022 MEETINGS!

June 8, 2022, 3 - 5 pm Virtual

**Kevin Killeavy, Acting Executive Director, MCERP
Karen Bass, Health Insurance Team Manager, OHR**

October 12, 2022, 4 - 6 pm Virtual

*One month prior to each meeting go to MCREA's website to preregister.
mcreaonline.com/annualmeeting.html*

MCREA President's Report – Sara Harris

Currently, considerations of the FY23 Montgomery County budget are underway prior to adoption by the County Council in late May. Information regarding a policy change proposed by the County Executive was sent to those of you who have provided your current email address to MCREA Membership. Important is your readiness when MCREA action is needed; your timely responses are important.

NOTE: See OPEB article on [page 5](#) for additional information.

Linda Herman recently retired as Executive Director of Montgomery County Employee Retirement Plans (MCERP). Since 2004, Linda, respected nationally for her leadership and expertise, managed investment programs and pension plans for County retirees and was a

featured presenter at MCREA all-member meetings. A national search to fill the MCERP Executive Director position is underway.

NOTE: See Appreciation for Linda Herman and MCREA Welcome on [page 4](#).

Overview: In March, the Board met with the County Council to discuss items such as retiree communication services, a policy change proposed by the County Executive and an organizational updating of MCREA and its member services. In April, MCREA provided testimony to the County Council regarding the proposed policy change. Two MCREA all-member meetings are scheduled in 2022 for June and October. And, after the 2022 general election, MCREA expects to meet with the newly elected County representatives including the two new additional Councilmembers and their key staff.

To address County retiree health benefit services, MCREA Board members met with Karen Bass, OHR Health Insurance Manager, and Jenna Shovlin, Administrative Services Manager, to discuss retirees' access to benefits and other information. I am pleased to report that the outcome, developed and provided by OHR, is an opportunity for retirees to preregister and ask benefit-related questions during weekly virtual Question and Answer sessions with OHR resource staff.

Within MCREA, several organizational updates are underway. To handle MCREA's project needs and/or when a Board position becomes open, I have established a panel of 3 Board members to engage with interested MCREA members, discuss details and recommend a next step. Currently, diligent Board member work teams are updating technology, communication, records retention, officer and Board member responsibilities and by-laws. Periodically, MCREA conducts Zoom user tests in an effort to provide you with the best possible communication during member meetings.

In 2022, the MCREA all-member meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, June 8 from 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm and Wednesday, October 12 from 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm; put the dates on your calendars and, nearer to the date/times of the meetings when you receive Zoom invites, pre-register. Your participation, interest and feedback is essential.

MCREA provides an essential service for members by monitoring decisions related to pensions and health benefits, responding to your inquiries, and providing information through the MCREA Newsletter, Facebook, telephone, email and snail mail. Please continue to share your experiences, thoughts, ideas related to MCREA.

Thank you for maintaining your MCREA membership; your dues support our communication with you. A special Thank You to those who help MCREA with short-term project assistance such as testing for Zoom meetings, reviewing records, preparing layout and design, preparing and updating documents and pursuing interest in Board member service. Together, our voice, our effort makes a difference!

WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN MCREA?

The very important mission of the MCREA is to protect and preserve the funding of the retirement pension (The Board of Investment Trust) and the various retirement health benefits from operating budget and (The Consolidated Retiree Health Benefits Trust).

MCREA monitors actions of local government elected officials. When we become aware of an action under consideration that could adversely impact the funding of the retirement and or health benefits, emails are sent to each MCREA member who has provided us with their email address. This allows MCREA members to communicate with the elected official and express their concerns.

Another way in which MCREA tries to keep MCREA members informed is through the newsletter which is sent to each retiree. MCREA member dues fund the printing, addressing and mailing of the newsletter.

The Member meetings (twice a year) are yet another way in which we keep the MCREA members informed. MCREA member dues pay for the Zoom license to hold these meetings. Almost 300 people registered for the October 2021 meeting. Here are a few comments from attendees: appreciated the "(S)implicity of the agenda, the organization of the leaders and the smoothness of the technology." "What I found to be most useful and beneficial was the time spent with Karen Bass. Not only was her presentation clear and concise, her exhibits were easy to follow and understand." "All presenters were well organized and prepared." "Liked the Zoom format since I am out of town. The ability to see the PowerPoint presentations was good as it meant I could choose whether to print them out later. I also liked the breakout sessions."

ARE YOU A RETIREE WITHOUT A PENSION?

Not every Montgomery County Government retiree is eligible for a pension, but all MoCo government retirees are eligible for the benefits of health/medical, dental, prescription/drug coverage, and life insurance provided through the MCOHR. As mentioned above, MCREA coordinates with OHR and monitors the County Council as they strive to fund, provide, and protect these important benefits. You, too, are encouraged to become a dues-paying retiree with a valid email address so MCREA can easily inform you of concerns that may arise.

Bottomline: If you are a MCREA member, you are kept informed.

Join YOUR retiree association today.

Dues options are: \$10 for 2 years; \$20 for 4 years; and \$25 for 5 years. Dues cover January 1 through December 31 each year. Use the Membership Application at the end of the

newsletter to mail in your dues or go to the MCREA website (see link below) and pay your dues using the PayPal option to Send Money to avoid a fee that is charged to MCREA.

See:

<http://www.mcreaonline.com/membership.html>

Questions or want to check your membership-dues status? Send an email to: MCREAMembership@gmail.com

Editor's Note: The decision to print the Membership Application back-to-back with the back page "Important Contact Information" and the mailing information inserted by the print shop) is deliberately in place to help MCREA staff correctly and more easily identify the retirees who send in their application, email address, and **dues** by mail. As needed, retirees may also go to mcreaonline.com to view the current newsletter or save their previous newsletter edition for the contact information.

Thank you for your support of MCREA!

APPRECIATION OF SERVICE

Linda Herman recently retired from her exemplary service for Montgomery County and retired County employees' interests which began in 1999 and continued with her appointment in 2004 to the position of Executive Director of Montgomery County Employee Retirement Plans (MCERP). Her leadership included managing investment programs and pension plans for thousands of County retirees and meeting with investment professionals to ensure top tier investment performances. Recognized by professional peers, Linda is held in high esteem nationally and has received awards for her standards of excellence.

Within MCREA, Linda is known for her comprehensive understanding, integrity and professional commitment to stable, secure retirements for County retired employees. At MCREA Annual Meetings, Linda has provided timely, essential information for County retirees, consistently serving with professionalism, navigating deftly the complexities of investment programs and retirement plans. MCREA members appreciate her expertise and are indeed fortunate beneficiaries of her efforts.

Best wishes to Linda for good times ahead!

WELCOME, Linda, to membership with MCREA!

IN THE NEWS:**Policy Change to OPEB in CE's Recommended Budget**

MCREA reviewed the County Executive's (CE) Recommended FY23 Budget sent to the County Council on March 15. There was a change related to the Consolidated Retiree Health Benefits Trust (CRHBT) that was established to help pay for retiree health benefits in future years. Sometimes referred to as OPEB, we want to bring this to your attention.

The CE changed the policy from fully funding the amount calculated by the actuary to taking funds out of the trust to help pay for retiree health insurance in the current year. This policy change translates to zero dollars contributed to the trust fund in FY23 and \$20 million taken from the trust.

The MCREA Board discussed this with the County Council at our annual meeting in March. The link to the meeting is at:

www.facebook.com/MontgomeryCountyMdCouncil/videos/515682620265198 (or www.tinyurl.com/3tjcvf57). We also sent a letter to the CE asking for reconsideration of this change. MCREA also asked members for whom we have email addresses to email the CE and each Councilmember expressing their concern and asking that the policy change be rescinded and an updated funding policy be established with input from MCREA.

We continue to work to get the policy changed and requested a seat at the table for any revisions. We will post an update on the MCREA website www.mcreaonline.com and Facebook in late May after the budget is approved.

Please note that this does NOT affect your current health insurance benefits.

MCREA Met with 311, MCERP and MCOHR to ADDRESS CONCERNS

To better address retirees' questions brought to MCREA's attention via emails or phone calls, MCREA met with 311, Employee Retirement Plans (ERP) and Office of Human Resources (OHR). 311 uses knowledge-based articles (KBAs) provided by ERP and OHR to answer questions. You, too, can link to these KBAs for help with your questions.

Link to MCERP KBAs: (scroll down to Retiree)

<https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/AllservicesbyDept.aspx?deptName=MCE>
[RP](https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/AllservicesbyDept.aspx?deptName=MCE) (or [tinyurl.com/y37p2dzs](https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/AllservicesbyDept.aspx?deptName=MCE))

Link to MCOHR KBAs: (scroll down to Benefits and Health Insurance, then Retiree)

<https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/AllservicesbyDept.aspx?deptName=OHR>
 (or [tinyurl.com/y4hmw49u](https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/AllservicesbyDept.aspx?deptName=OHR))

COVID-19:

For useful COVID-19 information, visit montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19

Go to seniorplanet.org/zoom-2/ for **instructions on how to use Zoom**. Before you join the MCREA’s June or October Zoom meeting(s) go to zoom.us/test to make sure that your camera and microphone are working properly in Zoom. Thank you.

NEWS from

MONTGOMERY COUNTY EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT PLANS (MCERP)

Participation in Montgomery County’s Retirement Plans as of June 30, 2021:

| | Employees’ Retirement System (ERS) | Retirement Savings Plan (RSP) | Guaranteed Retirement Income Plan (GRIP) | County Deferred Compensation Plan (DCP) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Active Members | 3,504 | 3,328 | 2,710 | 2,161 |
| Retirees & Beneficiaries | 6,843 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Terminated-still participating | 159 | 1,060 | 444 | 1,262 |

Go to montgomerycountymd.gov/mcerp for more on the status of the various plans, scroll down and click on *Board’s Annual Report – June 30, 2021*

Note: The Required Mandatory Distribution (RMD) age for those in the RSP, the GRIP and the DCP is now age 72.

Last Investment Thoughts from Retiring Linda Herman to the MCREA:

As we have highlighted for many years, Staff, the Boards, our consultants, and the vast majority of our peers believe divestment to be an imprudent investment strategy given the high costs, decreased diversification, and impact such a move would have on the inflation protecting characteristics of the plans. These last 18 months have validated our approach as energy securities have been by far and away the strongest performing segment of the market as inflation has returned to levels not seen in the 1970s. We believe that our beneficiaries are much better served instead by a heavy focus on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors as a way to mitigate risk. Additionally, our plans continue to invest in attractive opportunities in the renewable energy sector, particularly solar and wind projects. For example, the plans just invested in a fund that invests in renewable energy assets and other sustainable infrastructure projects across North America. Another one of our renewable investment managers makes loans to solar developers and they estimated that their investments offset nearly 4 million metric tons of CO₂ in the last year.

COLA-Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustment

The amount of the July 2022 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Montgomery County Government retirees is based on the change in the Consumer Price (CPI) Index-All Urban Consumers, Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-MD-VA (CPI-U) from May 2021 to May 2022 as calculated by the federal government. The March CPI-U has been published; the calculated COLA from May 2021 to March 2022 is 5.948%.

The COLA percentage increase for each pension-eligible retiree or beneficiary is determined by a number of factors including the date the retiree became a member of the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) and their date of retirement. In late June the MCERP will send an explanation of each individual's COLA which becomes effective July 1, 2022 and is direct deposited into each eligible person's bank account.

Social Security/Medicare Virtual Seminars

The Social Security Administration (SSA) will be conducting 2 more virtual seminars in 2022. A SSA representative will provide employees and retirees with information about Social Security, Medicare, their online services and will be available to answer questions. The seminars will be held from 2:00pm - 4:00pm on the following dates:

Wednesday, June 8, 2022 or Wednesday, November 2, 2022

To register for the seminar, please use the link below. Please pick only one date that is most convenient for you. MCERP will send a reminder email a few days before the event.

Register at: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080e4ea4a62aa6f85-social5>

NEWS from
MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES (OHR)

| MCG Retiree Insurance Enrollment Statistics as of 2/21/2022 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------|--|-------------|-------------|
| Retirees | Medical Plans | | | | |
| | CareFirst Indemnity | High POS | Standard POS | Kaiser w/RX | UHC |
| Non-Medicare | 7 | 928 | 161 | 106 | 396 |
| Medicare | 373 | 1863 | 836 | 259 | 632 |
| Total Retirees (includes survivors) | 380 | 2791 | 997 | 365 | 1028 |
| | PPO Dental Plan | Vision* | Caremark/SilverScript Prescription Drug Plan | | |
| | | | High RX | Standard RX | Total RX |
| Non-Medicare | 1543 | | 128 | 1391 | 1519 |
| Medicare | 4493 | | 501 | 2670 | 3171 |
| Total Retirees (includes survivors) | 6036 | | 629 | 4061 | 4690 |

* All retirees have access to discount vision plan effective January 1, 2019.

Attention: Retirees and Their Dependents
New Virtual Retiree Health Insurance Office Hours
Every Thursday from 3 – 4 pm via Zoom

Starting in April, the Office of Human Resources (OHR) Health Insurance Team will be hosting weekly virtual office hours every Thursday from 3 to 4 pm for current retirees and their dependents. The first session was held on Thursday, April 7.

How does it work? Follow the steps below to register and attend the virtual office hours:

1. You need to register in advance. Register to attend the weekly Zoom meeting at [tinyurl.com/jfxt3nzx](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080e4ea4a62aa6f85-social5).
2. After you register, you will receive an email with a Zoom link to join the meeting.
3. Click on the Zoom link at any time during the hour (Thursday from 3 to 4 pm) to join the meeting.
4. You will need to register again each week that you would like to attend.

Continued . . .

When you join the Zoom meeting, members of the OHR Health Insurance Team will be available to answer any questions you may have. Below are some examples of the types of questions that the OHR Health Insurance Team can assist you and/or your dependents with during these weekly virtual office hours:

- Have you been approved for Social Security prior to turning age 65?
- Do you need to enroll in Medicare?
- Should you continue to be enrolled in the High Point of Service plan?
- Is there any value to being enrolled in the High Prescription Drug plan?
- Do you have a cost share that is expiring?

These virtual meetings will be a public forum. If you need assistance with a private matter, you will be moved to a break-out session with a member of the team who will be able to assist you.

For those retirees that do not have a computer, tablet or mobile device, meetings can be accessed by telephone by dialing the number associated with your location:

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC) | +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose) |
| +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago) | +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma) |
| +1 929 436 2866 US (New York) | +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston) |

When prompted enter the Meeting ID: 839 4340 5238 and press pound sign (#).

You will not need a participant ID, when prompted for this information just press the pound sign (#) on your keypad you will be joined in the meeting.

If you have any questions about these weekly virtual office hour meetings, please contact MC311 at 240-777-0311.

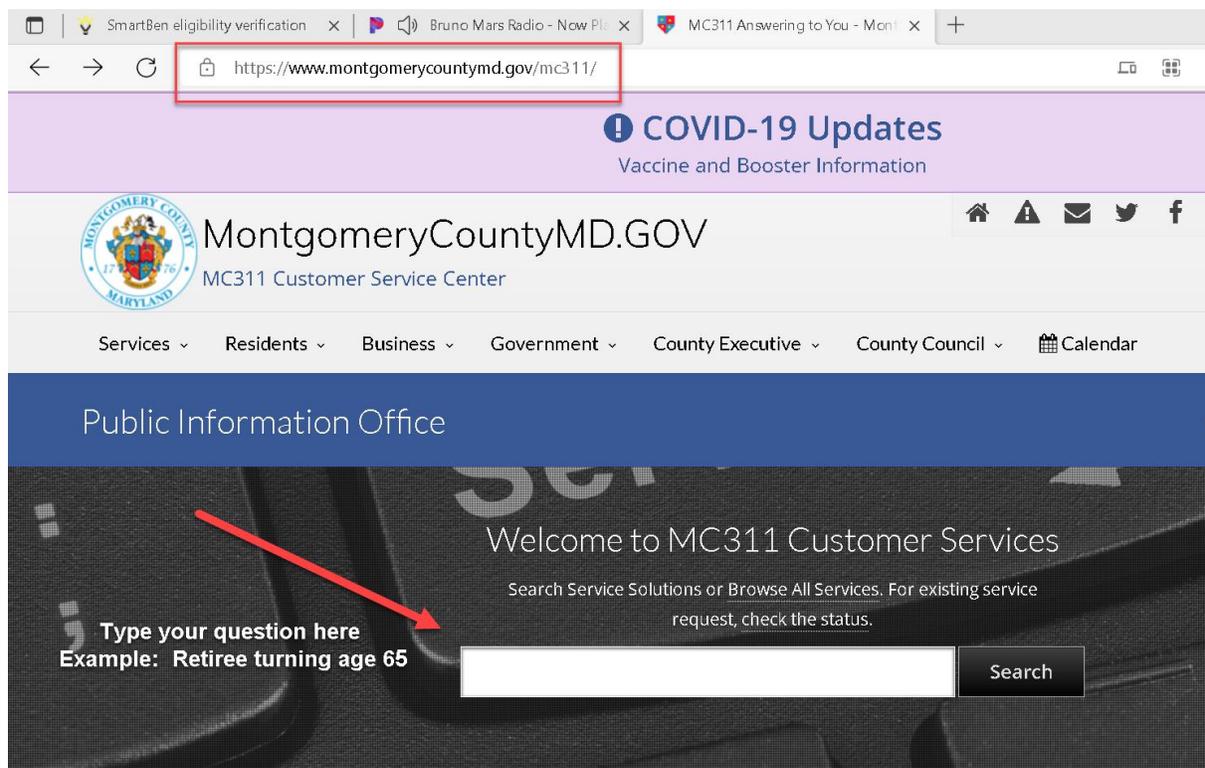
Emergency Calls @MC311

The County's Health Insurance Team is dedicated to supporting the needs of our customers and includes active employees, retirees, participating agencies, and all eligible dependents, which totals over 33,000 covered lives. Customer service is designed to address requests that are basic to highly complex and with limited internal resources, continued increases in call volume, and a need to measure responsiveness and results, top leadership made the decision to move all OHR customer service requests to MC311 in 2016. MC311 allows the County to track the number of calls, aggregate the calls by category, provides accountability standards by which the Health Insurance Manager is measured and provides one point of entry to avoid redundancy of calls to multiple members of the team. The Health Insurance team reviews the MC311 knowledge-based articles (KBAs) on an annual basis to ensure that they have the most accurate information available to provide to our customers.

OHR implemented a system to handle emergency calls. An emergency is defined as someone who is being denied service in the moment (e.g., standing at a pharmacy counter or at a doctor's office being told they don't have insurance) or the notification of a death. An emergency call is submitted through MC311 (240-777-0311) and once the call taker discerns that the issue falls under an emergency, the call is routed in the moment to a member of the Health Insurance team to respond.

Retirees can also search the knowledge-based articles (KBAs) at:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc311 (See **page 6**)



IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION continued from the last page of the newsletter:

Caremark: 1-866-240-4926 www.caremark.com

SilverScript 1-866-249-6167 www.mcg.silverscript.com

Cigna (Dental): 1-800-244-6224 www.cigna.com

Eyemed: 1-866-801-1479 www.eyemed.com; the Discount Plan # is 1018309

Amplifon (Hearing): 1-888-784-6050 www.AmplifonUSA.com

Prudential Long-Term Care Insurance: 1-800-732-0416 www.Prudential.com

ACSIA Long Term Care Insurance: 410-455-4680 / 443-275-1764; www.MCG-LTC.com

Met Life 1-800-638-6420 <http://www.metlife.com>



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please PRINT CLEARLY or Use an Address Label

RETIREE: Last Name _____ First _____ M.I. _____

Spouse (Optional): First Name _____ Last Name if different from above _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

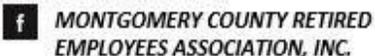
Phone: Home _____ Cell _____

Email Address: _____

Thank you for your support!
MCREA holds this information in confidence. It is not shared or sold to other groups or organizations.

For additional information about Annual meetings, health insurance, Newsletters, helpful contact information, and much more, visit www.mcreaonline.com or email: MCREAMembership@gmail.com

FIND US ON FACEBOOK:



Application for: New Renewal

Minimum Dues per retiree: **\$10.00 for 2 years paid for calendar year - January 1 thru December 31**

Enclosed are dues for:
 2 years (\$10.00) 4 years (\$20.00)
 5 years (\$25.00)

Check# _____

Date on Check _____

Please make check payable to MCREA

Enclose check with this completed form and mail to:
MCREA, PO Box 73, Rockville, MD 20848-0073

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

MCREA: 301-929-9339; website: www.MCREAonline.com; emails: MCREAMembership@gmail.com or PresidentMCREA@gmail.com
Facebook: Montgomery County Retired Employees' Association, Inc.
Montgomery County Government: **MC311:** 240-777-0311 or just 311 (local)
For Montgomery County Employee Retirement Plans: 240-777-8230;
Fax: 301-279-1424; website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcerp
Fidelity (Deferred Compensation Plan): 1-800-343-0860 or 240-777-8228
For Group/Health Insurance: 240-777-0311 also visit www.mc311.com or www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HIret
CareFirst Blue Cross-Blue Shield: Member Services: 1-888-417-8385 www.Carefirst.com
Kaiser Permanente: Washington Area: 301-468-6000; Baltimore Area: 1-800-777-7902
<https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org>
United Healthcare: Member Services: 1-800-638-0014 www.myuhc.com
See page 10 for more contact information

This newsletter is published by: Montgomery County Retired Employees' Association, Inc. P.O. Box 73, Rockville, Maryland 20848-0073. Editor: Irm Damazo. Feedback is welcomed.

MCREA

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