



MCREA

Montgomery County Retired
Employees' Association, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

November 2024

WELCOME TO MCREA's FIRST ON-LINE NEWSLETTER!

MCREA 2025 Virtual Member Meetings— Save the Dates!

and Plan to Attend!

Wednesday, June 11 and Wednesday, October 8, 2025

Times to be announced

**Note: Reminder emails for each meeting will be sent to dues-paying
MCREA members for whom we have an email address**

Message from Sara Harris, President, MCREA

Retirees!! Thank You!! To all of you who promptly emailed elected officials about the MCREA-approved candidates for the retiree representative on the BIT/CRHBT (Board of Investment Trustees/Consolidated Retiree Health Benefits Trust), you made a difference! A special thank you also goes to the Montgomery County Retired Firefighters Association, who sent a letter supporting MCREA's efforts! Thanks to these efforts, the retiree representative selection process, long delayed, has now progressed!

Margaret Knill!! Thank You!! As MCREA's Membership Chair and Board Member, she quickly provided you with information and asked you to respond! The effort was monumental, emailing approximately 8,000 retirees about the BIT/CRHBT retirees' board representative selection and, again, emailing approximately 8,000 retirees about the October 9 MCREA Member Meeting!

Deborah Snead!! Thank You!! By serving an extra eight months as the retiree representative on BIT/CRHBT, you continued to protect the voice of the County's retirees!

REMINDER: Keep your email information current so we can keep you current!

MCREA's Board has been busy in 2024, devoting considerable time and effort toward:

- Providing candidates for and monitoring the selection of the MCREA retiree representative on the BIT/CRHBT. MCREA finally can announce the appointment and confirmation of a MCREA Board-approved candidate as the retiree representative on the BIT/CRHBT, forwarded months ago to the County Executive for selection. *See* pages 3 and 10 for details.
- Preparing and providing you with this online MCREA Newsletter. This effort, real-time, will provide the MCREA Board with information about service, cost and convenience, for both retirees and the organization. The MCREA Board is responding to you who have asked for an e-newsletter and to you who prefer a paper newsletter (to paid members only, who request one). The newsletter is available to everyone on MCREA's website, mcreaonline.com.
- Meetings to discuss mutual interests. Recently, past Council President, Evan Glass and staff informed MCREA of continuing progress with reducing ERS and CRHBT (Employees Retirement System and Consolidated Retiree Health Benefits Trust) investments in fossil fuels; already low, the reduction, went from 1.9% of nearly 300 funds to a recent impressive low of 1.1%. *See* ERP article on page 7 for further details.

Finally, let us hear your thoughts about MCREA's actions, and consider working on an area of need as a MCREA Board member. Look for the section on Important Board Needs on page 3. Also, please pay your dues and keep up the good work of responding when we ask. We all can benefit from each other!

Thank you for your support!

MCREA NEWS

After the adjournment of the June 12, 2024, Membership Meeting, the Board met and unanimously approved the following officers of MCREA for the coming year:

2024-2025 MCREA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sara Harris – President	Beryl Feinberg
Kathy Best – Vice President	Belinda Fulco*
Suzanne Hudson - Secretary	Barbara Garrard
Bruce Meier - Treasurer	Karen Federman Henry
Fran Abrams	Margaret Knill
Michael Dennis	Rick Sullivan
Michael Faden*	*Presidential Appointment

IMPORTANT BOARD NEEDS

The MCREA is seeking applicants to fill two important roles on the Board:

Membership Coordinator—this position requires specific skills in Excel databases, plus the ability to provide accurate recording of membership and financial data. In addition, the Membership Coordinator provides bulk email notifications to members regarding dues or other announcements. The individual must live in Montgomery County and work with Margaret Knill, Membership Chair.

Experienced Zoom Assistant—this position needs to be able to work with Margaret Knill to organize all Board and membership meetings, to advise (teach) attendees how to use various functions within Zoom, and to provide back up to the Zoom Master for MCREA.

Please refer any questions or expressions of interest in serving in these positions by email to MCREAMembership@gmail.com stating why you wish to serve, along with the skills and experience you have to be a successful Membership Coordinator or Zoom Assistant. Please include your home address, email, and phone number. **Letters of interest must be received no later than November 30, 2024.**

THE MCREA BOARD ASKED AND YOU RESPONDED--AGAIN!

This time, the Board asked for your assistance in contacting the County Executive and County Council regarding a long overdue appointment of the MCREA representative to the Board of Investment Trustees/Consolidated Retiree Health Benefits Trust (BIT/CRHBT). **On October 22, the County Council approved the appointment of Linda Herman to this position.**

More than a year ago, the Board began the task of seeking a nominee to fill the MCREA representative position when the current person's term expired in March 2024. After reviewing applications and performing interviews, the Board submitted a name to the County Executive in November 2023. Several MCREA inquiries regarding the status of the appointment yielded a request for two more names so that the County Executive would have three names to consider. The Board complied with the request, but no appointment occurred. Following multiple inquiries, the County Executive submitted an appointee to the County Council in September 2024, but the name provided was not one of the three recommended by the MCREA Board.

While the Board recognizes that the law creating the BIT does not specify that the County Executive must choose one of the individuals that MCREA recommends, this is the first time a County Executive has not done so in almost 40 years. Thanks to your communications, the County Council declined to confirm the appointment submitted by the County Executive. Ultimately, the recommended MCREA representative on the BIT/CRHBT was appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council.

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES (OHR) NEWS

2025 Plan Year Rates

All retiree health insurance plans will be staying the same in 2025. However, there will be increases for most plans:

Plan Name	Increase %
Medical	
CareFirst Indemnity	0%
CareFirst Standard POS	12.1%
CareFirst High POS	12.1%
Kaiser Non-Medicare	6.5%
Kaiser Medicare	2.0%
Prescription	
Caremark High Plan	11.9%
Silverscript High Plan	11.19%
Dental	
Cigna PPO	2.2%
Vision	
Discount Vision	0%
Fully Insured Vision	0%

Rates will be available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HIRet on November 1, 2024.

2025 Retiree Fact Sheets

Retiree annual fact sheets will be mailed to retiree homes by early November. You can expect to receive them on or before November 8th. The fact sheet outlines your specific costs by comparing your current 2024 plans and costs to the new 2025 costs.

The County Does Not Offer Retiree Open Enrollment

Because retirees pay for their retiree health insurance premiums on a post-tax basis, County retirees are permitted to make plan changes throughout the year. Therefore, there is no annual open enrollment period for retirees.

Medicare has different rules. Medicare's annual open enrollment period runs from October 15 – December 7. This is any Medicare-eligible individual's opportunity to drop, switch or enroll in a Medicare Part D plan. If you are enrolled in the County's prescription plan, you do not need to participate in Medicare's annual open enrollment as OHR has already enrolled you in Part D.

Changing your Elections

If you wish to change plans, you can do so every month by completing an election form. Election forms can be found online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HIRET. Forms

received by the 10th of the month will be effective the 1st of the following month. The 2025 election form will be available online by November 1st.

Medicare-Eligible Retirees and Dependents Must Be Enrolled in Medicare

Enrollment in Medicare Parts A and B is required for all retirees and covered dependents when they become Medicare entitled. Medicare entitlement occurs for most people the month they turn age 65. However, there are other reasons that you or your covered dependent can become entitled to Medicare earlier than age 65, such as Social Security Disability, End-Stage Renal Disease, etc. If you or your covered dependent become entitled to Medicare due to turning age 65 or for other reasons, it is your responsibility to make sure that you and/or your covered dependent enrolls in Medicare Parts A and B upon entitlement, and you must notify the Office of Human Resources.

2025 Caremark and Silverscript Standard Prescription Deductible

A new plan year brings a fresh start. If you are enrolled in the Caremark/Silverscript Standard prescription plan, the annual deductible resets every year on January 1. This means that, effective January 1, 2025, you must first pay the \$50 annual deductible before you begin to pay the plan's prescription drug copayments. The \$50 deductible can be satisfied by any combination of covered family members. However, it may take more than one prescription before the deductible is met.

The 2025 formulary drug list (list of approved covered drugs) will become available online in late November.

If you have a prior authorization on file for a specific drug, remember that the prior authorization will need to be renewed in January 2025.

Important Message About Vaccines

The County's prescription plan does not cover vaccines. Vaccines are considered a medical expense and therefore, you must present your *medical* ID card at the time of service.

A special note just for CareFirst members: If you are a CareFirst member living outside of MD, DC, and VA, you must visit a participating provider's office to receive your covered vaccines. Vaccines will not be covered at a pharmacy if you are outside of the CareFirst service area (*i.e.*, another state outside of MD, DC, VA).

Keep Your Life Insurance Beneficiary Up to Date

If your situation changes at any time—such as marriage, divorce, or death of a dependent—update your beneficiaries to make sure the County has your updated life insurance beneficiary selection on file. If you don't know who your current beneficiary is, simply fill out a fresh [digital life insurance beneficiary form](#). In the event of your death, OHR will report the latest designated life insurance beneficiary that is on file to the life insurance vendor for claim payment. **When in doubt, just complete and submit a new form.**

Who to Contact When You Need Assistance with Your Benefits

The Carriers are the insurance companies that pay your providers for your healthcare services. Your carriers should be your first call when you have questions about things like estimating your portion of the cost of a procedure, understanding how a claim was paid, confirming if a service requires pre-authorization, finding an in-network provider, and ordering a new ID card. Find [benefits carrier contact information here](#).

Your Providers are the professionals (doctors, dentists, etc.) who provide your healthcare, examine and diagnose illnesses, and prescribe treatments. Contact your provider if you need to make an appointment, estimate the total cost of a procedure, make a payment (copay or coinsurance), get advice regarding symptoms, or review results of lab tests.

OHR's Health Insurance Team knows the most about your plan choices and your cost for coverage. Contact OHR's Health Insurance Team if you need help with things like understanding the plan differences and making changes to your benefits.

Dependent Children Aging Out

Your dependent children (biological, legally adopted, stepchildren or under your legal custody) are eligible for your MCG retiree health plan(s) up **until** age 26. Once they reach age 26, they are no longer eligible for MCG's plans unless they are disabled.

What happens when my covered child turns 26? Your child will be covered up until 11:59 pm on the last day they are age 25. At midnight on their 26th birthday, they are no longer covered. This happens automatically. MCG's insurance carriers do not provide advance notification. It is your responsibility to remember and work with your child to make other arrangements for their continued coverage.

My dependent is disabled. What must I do to ensure they can remain on my plans after turning 26? If your dependent is disabled and has maintained continuous coverage on your plan(s) before their 26th birthday, you may continue to cover your disabled dependent past the age of 26 if you obtain disability approval from your MCG medical plan. Take the following action before their 26th birthday:

- Complete the necessary disabled dependent authorization form and submit to your MCG medical carrier for approval. Disabled dependent authorization forms are available on the [OHR health insurance webpages](#) or you may obtain the form by contacting your MCG medical carrier. It is recommended that you start this process approximately 3 months before your child's 26th birthday.
- If your MCG medical carrier deems your dependent disabled and provides authorization approval for them to remain on the plans, you must provide that approval in writing to OHR's Health Insurance Team prior to your child's 26th birthday.

Note: If the medical carrier disability authorization approval is submitted to OHR after your dependent reaches age 26, they may not remain on your plans.

Retiree Vision Options may help with hearing aids

See this link for information on hearing discounts through Amplifon:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HR/Resources/Files/Benefits/2024/Hearing%20Discount%20Member%20Flyer.pdf>

Retiree Benefits include Virtual Q&A Hour!

Retiree Virtual Office Hours (Zoom) are held on the 1st Thursday of every month from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST. This is a great opportunity to ask questions about your retiree benefits (plans, insurance rates, beneficiaries, forms, etc.)! Members of the OHR Health Insurance Team will be available to answer any questions you may have. Some months, OHR may also present on important topics or bring the insurance carriers into the meeting to address plan-specific questions and concerns. [Register to attend the monthly zoom meeting here.](#)

DON'T FORGET TO VISIT [HTTPS://MCREAONLINE.COM!](https://mcreaonline.com)

Whether using your own electronic device or visiting a public library to use their computers, MCREA's website offers links and phone numbers to reach health and retiree benefits, newsletters, useful forms, and other helpful information. With so many entities going paperless, see how valuable the MCREA website can be. **Check it out!**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT PLANS (MCERP) NEWS

Dear Retirees,

The Montgomery County Employee's Retirement Plans (MCERP) administers \$8.15B in member, beneficiary, participant, and dependent assets. We're charged with ensuring the money entrusted to us on behalf of the same groups will be there to meet them when the time comes to pay out benefits or disbursements. We at MCERP take this duty very seriously, and we're charged legally (as fiduciaries) to have your best interest at the forefront of every decision we make. To be clear, that means that every decision we make must put the needs of other parties, groups, or individuals behind what will ultimately improve our ability to pay out benefits and disbursements when you'll need them the most.

The Consolidated Retiree Health Benefits Trust (CRHBT) is a trust holding \$1.8B of the \$8.15B noted above. The trust was created to set aside funding to help cover health insurance costs for Montgomery County Government retirees, funded solely by the Montgomery County Government and administered by MCERP. Similarly, the Employees Retirement System (ERS), which includes the Guaranteed Retirement Income Plan (GRIP), is a trust holding \$4.9B of the \$8.15B noted above. The ERS was established as a cost-sharing, multiple-employer defined benefit pension plan providing benefits to the employees of the Montgomery County Government and other agencies or political subdivisions who elected to participate. Both trusts leverage the same MCERP investment

staff and industry expertise, invest in the same investments, and, as a result, participate equally in cost savings realized through economies of scale.

Sustainability and Our Pension Plan: Addressing Fossil Fuel Investments

As stewards of your retirement funds, we constantly monitor economic, environmental, and social trends to make informed decisions about the investments that support your pension and health benefit trusts. Safeguarding your financial security remains our top priority, and part of that responsibility includes navigating the evolving landscape of investment opportunities. One of the most frequently discussed topics today is the impact of fossil fuel investments, and we want to share the significant progress we've made in this area while continuing to fulfill our fiduciary duty to you.

Fossil Fuel Investments: A Complex Issue

Fossil fuels, such as oil, natural gas, and coal, have long been a significant part of global markets. These industries have historically provided strong returns that helped sustain trust funds like ours. However, in recent years, the environmental impact of these investments has come under increased scrutiny. Climate change concerns, policy shifts, and the rising prominence of renewable energy sources have led many pension plans, including ours, to evaluate their fossil fuel investments carefully.

Our priority is to ensure your pension remains financially sound while responding to changing market realities and environmental considerations.

Shifts in the Energy Market

The global energy landscape is shifting rapidly. The rise of renewable energy and technological advancements are beginning to outpace the growth of traditional fossil fuel industries. This shift has prompted a rethinking of long-term investment strategies. Many experts predict that over the next two decades, renewable energy could surpass fossil fuels as the dominant source of energy. As your pension and health insurance trust managers, it is our responsibility to ensure our portfolio remains aligned with future economic growth areas.

Our Approach to Sustainable Investing

In response to these changes, we have diversified our investment portfolio and reduced reliance on fossil fuels. This does not mean immediate divestment from fossil fuel-related assets, as doing so could risk significant financial losses. Still, it does mean a gradual and responsible transition toward sustainable investments. We're currently actively allocating to renewable energy companies, green technologies, and other sectors that are both profitable and environmentally sustainable.

As fiduciaries of your trust funds, we're legally and ethically obligated to prioritize the fund's financial security on a risk-adjusted basis—risk is a hydra with many heads. While environmental sustainability is a key consideration in today's investment landscape, it must be balanced with our obligation to generate strong, risk-adjusted returns for current and future retirees.

- **A Measured Approach:** Instead of immediate divestment from fossil fuel industries, which could result in short or long-term losses, we have chosen a

measured approach that minimizes financial risk while reducing our carbon footprint.

- **Due Diligence and Expert Guidance:** Every investment decision is made following careful analysis, supported by input from expert consultants and industry experts who specialize in both sustainable investing and long-term financial performance.

Our Achievements in Lowering Fossil Fuel Exposure

Over the past fifteen years, we've significantly reduced the exposure to fossil fuels within both trusts. This shift hasn't been accidental; MCERP has proactively implemented ESG factors as part of its investment diligence process since 2009. As a result, we've successfully:

- **Reduced Carbon 200 Investments:** As of 2024, our portfolio's exposure to Carbon 200 companies has been reduced by over 40% compared to six years ago. We achieved this while maintaining strong returns for our members.
- **Outpaced Larger Trusts in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investments:** As a result of our strong investment philosophy and implementation around ESG factors in our diligence process, MCERP has more dollars in ESG investments as a percent of total assets under management than much larger plans like CalPERS and CalSTRS.
- **Made a Positive and Real Environmental Impact:** Seven out of eight past infrastructure investments are in funds that make renewable investments. One of MCERP's recent investments alone reduces carbon impact by 9,984 tons of CO₂ annually—this is equivalent to eliminating 154,000 shipping truck journeys annually.

Looking Forward

We're committed to balancing the need for strong financial returns with our responsibility to support a more sustainable future. While fossil fuel investments remain part of our portfolio, our approach to investing will undoubtedly lead to leadership in reducing fossil fuel investments while maintaining strong returns for the trusts. We'll continue engaging with investment experts to ensure we make decisions that benefit you and the planet.

Eli Martinez

Executive Director, MCERP

OTHER NEWS AND UPDATES

INTRODUCING THE NEW MCREA REPRESENTATIVE ON BIT/CRHBT

We are pleased to announce that Linda Herman has been appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council to serve as MCREA's new representative on the County's Board of Investment Trustees (BIT) and on the Board of the Consolidated Retirees Health Benefits Trust (CRHBT) for the next three years.

Linda's name may be familiar to retirees, as she is the former Executive Director of the Montgomery County Employee Retirement Plans. She joined the County in 1999 as a

senior investment officer and in 2003 became Executive Director, retiring in 2022 after 23 years. Prior public service included working at the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) for 26 years where she held a similar position.

BIT and CRHBT oversee the investment programs for the County's retirement plans and retiree future health benefits. This is a fiduciary responsibility with goals to maximize investment returns and ensure long-term stability of these funds that pay for retiree benefits. For more information and details, visit the ERP website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcerp.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

It is important that you renew your membership in your retiree organization so that you stay informed about issues impacting retirees. Use the below link to do so:

<https://mcreaonline.com/membership>

You can pay your dues either by printing the form and mailing it along with your check it to the MCREA address on the bottom of the form **OR** you can use the Paypal option on the same page.

The dues are \$10 for 2 years, \$20 for 4 years, or \$25 for 5 years.

ADDITIONAL REMINDERS FOR RETIREES:

From time to time, we need to make changes to our forms. Most are available on the OHR website under the retiree link and, also, on the MCREA website. Here are a few common items that you may need:

For forms to update your taxes, address, or direct deposit information, please visit <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcerp/retirees.html> or call MC311.

Enroll in Medicare online (do not delay once you are eligible):

<https://www.ssa.gov/medicare/sign-up>

Retiree Election Form:

https://forms.montgomerycountymd.gov/f/2023_Retiree_HealthandLifeInsurance_ElectionForm

Life Insurance Beneficiary Form:

<https://forms.montgomerycountymd.gov/f/LifeInsuranceBeneficiaryForm>

NEW TO MCREA ONLINE? VISIT [HTTPS://MCREAONLINE.COM](https://mcreaonline.com) NOW!

As you read this on-line newsletter, take a few moments to visit MCREA's website and see the wealth of information available there. MCREA's website offers links and phone numbers to reach health and retiree benefits, newsletters, useful forms, and other helpful information. With so many entities going paperless, see how valuable the MCREA website can be. **CHECK IT OUT!**

MATERIALS PROVIDED BY OHR AND ERP FOR THE JUNE 12 AND OCTOBER 9 MEMBER MEETINGS APPEAR ON THE WEBSITE at <https://mcreaonline.com/mcrea-meetings/> – check them out!

On October 9, 2024:

- Eli Martinez reviewed the status of the plans and the CRHBT, available investment advice and services, social security, MCERP Events and Contacts
- Karen Bass provided an overview of 2025 Insurance Rates, Medicare Open Enrollment, SilverScript Audit, and reminded us of Retiree Virtual Office Hours

REMEMBER!

The dues year for MCREA runs from January through December.

What you can do NOW—We encourage MCREA members to make sure your dues have been paid and that MCREA has your current email by sending it to MCREAMembership@gmail.com OR go to <https://MCREAonline.com/membership> and print the renewal form to pay your dues or by using PayPal option.

If you are not a dues-paying MCREA member, join your retiree organization today! Simply go to <https://MCREAonline.com/membership>, print out the membership form and mail it with your check to the address on the form **OR** use the PayPal option to pay your dues.

For questions about your membership status, when to renew your dues, and change of mailing address, please send an email to MCREAMembership@gmail.com. **Note** that you must notify Montgomery County Government of an address change separately from MCREA.

COUNTY UPGRADES 'MONTY 2.0,' A 311 CHATBOT POWERED BY AI

As you know, MC311 is the county's online and telephone customer service center. Monty was added to MC311's website to provide residents with information on commonly requested services. The upgraded Monty can converse with residents in a more personable way and now can understand and respond in over 100 languages.

The upgraded version provides a more robust experience by:

- ensuring residents receive quick, accurate, relevant and meaningful responses on more than 3,000 topics and
- seeking feedback from residents to better meet their needs and working with county departments to improve response accuracy.

READ THIS NOTICE AGAIN:
CHANGE TO NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION!

In the spring newsletter, we explained that, for many years, MCREA has mailed two paper Newsletters each year to **all** retirees. The printing/mailing of the newsletters is the major expense for MCREA, especially with only a small percentage of retirees paying dues.

As a result of the continuing increased costs for the Newsletter, and the feedback received by the MCREA President, the Board decided to make the following modifications to that practice in 2024:

- The April Newsletter was mailed to all retirees in the usual green-paper format.
- The Fall Newsletter **is available only on the MCREA website around November 1st. Note:** An email will be sent to **dues-paying MCREA members for whom we have emails advising them that the newsletter is available on the website and including a link to it.**

The MCREA Board will evaluate this action at the end of 2024, and we will provide information about the evaluation in the Spring 2025 newsletter.

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

MCREA: 301-929-9339 <https://MCREAonline.com>

MCREAMembership@gmail.com or PresidentMCREA@gmail.com

MC311: 240-777-0311 or www.mc311.com

Montgomery County Government MC311: 240-777-0311 or just 311 (local)

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

Group/Health Insurance: 240-773-6471 (OHR at MC311); 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

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

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

EyeMed: 1-866-939-3633 www.eyemed.com