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# The Solon

The newsletter for members of the General Assembly Retirement System of Illinois



AUGUST 2020



Keep your Member Services contact information up to date to receive the latest news and announcements.

## Your Benefit Statement

Enclosed with this *Solon* is your current benefit statement, which provides detailed information about your GARS benefits as of June 30, 2020 and lists your current beneficiaries. Please review this information carefully.

If you need to change or update information for beneficiaries, visit [https://srs.illinois.gov/GARS/forms\\_gars.htm](https://srs.illinois.gov/GARS/forms_gars.htm) to find the Death Benefit Beneficiary Designation form. If you have questions about your statement, you can contact GARS staff at (217) 782-8500 or (217) 785-6966.

## Opt Out of Paper Statements

Did you know that mail theft is one of the most common ways identity theft or fraud can happen to you? Opting out of paper statements decreases the risk of your personal information falling into the wrong hands.

If you have not already done so, visit [https://srs.illinois.gov/GARS/MemServiceHelp\\_gars.htm](https://srs.illinois.gov/GARS/MemServiceHelp_gars.htm) to create a Member Services online account. If you already have a Member Services online account, you may log on to the website at <http://memberservices.srs.illinois.gov>. By registering and using the [Member Services](#) website, you can not only opt out of paper statements, but also access account information and beneficiary information, as well as GARS forms and publications. In addition, all annual statements since June 30, 2014, including your current statement, are available on the [Member Services](#) website.

If you need technical support to access the Member Services website, please call the SRS Help Desk at (217) 782-4202.

## Stay Connected with GARS

The COVID-19 pandemic quickly forced GARS to adapt to working remotely. With staff working from home, email became the primary method of communicating with our members. In the next few years, we plan to transition to paperless statements and will notify our members by email when statements are available to view in their Member Services accounts.

Please provide GARS with your email address and phone number so that you do not miss important information. You can do this by

calling us at (217) 782-8500 or by signing into and updating your Member Services account. If you do not have an online account, visit [https://srs.illinois.gov/GARS/MemServiceHelp\\_gars.htm](https://srs.illinois.gov/GARS/MemServiceHelp_gars.htm) and click on Member Services for instructions.

## GARS Operations Update

GARS staff is adapting to deliver the services you expect during the difficult times created by the COVID-19 pandemic and has begun the transition back to the Springfield office. Employees are subject to daily temperature checks upon arrival at work, and measures have been taken to minimize staff interaction in common areas and to allow for social distancing throughout the building.

The SRS building remains closed to visitors, and all business travel is suspended until at least January 1, 2021. As a result, GARS benefit and retirement counseling will continue to be available over the telephone. Email GARS Manager [Angie Ackerson](#) at [gars@srs.illinois.gov](mailto:gars@srs.illinois.gov) to request your individual telephone conference. Customized estimates will be prepared for and mailed to you before your conference. If you have reciprocal service, GARS may need approximately 4 to 6 weeks to consult with other retirement systems and prepare your customized estimates.

## NCPERS Special Enrollment and Open Enrollment

GARS offers a voluntary life insurance plan to its members through the [National Conference of Public Employee Retirement Systems](#) (NCPERS). Coverage is guaranteed with no medical questions asked. This plan provides financial protection for you and your family with a low premium of \$16 per month.

GARS is offering an open enrollment period for the voluntary group life insurance coverage to our actively working members. **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the enrollment period will be earlier this year and you can enroll now through November 30, 2020.** There is no guarantee that another open enrollment period will be offered in the future, and you can enroll only while actively working.

For more information, visit <https://ncpers.memberbenefits.com/srs/>. Questions should be directed to NCPERS by calling (800) 525-8056 or emailing: [NCPERS@memberbenefits.com](mailto:NCPERS@memberbenefits.com).

## Member Services

1. From an Internet browser, access: [memberservices.srs.illinois.gov](http://memberservices.srs.illinois.gov)  
The "State of Illinois Public Account Portal" will appear on the screen.
2. Click the "Create a New Account" button. The "Create a New Account" portal webpage will appear on the screen.
3. Input your "First Name".
4. Input your "Last Name".
5. Input your "Email Address" (business or personal email is accepted)
6. Confirm "Email Address".
7. Input/create your "Username" in accordance with the criteria below.
8. Input/create a password in accordance with the State of Illinois Password Complexity Requirements are listed below.
9. Input "Password".
10. Confirm "Password".
11. Click on the "Register" button.

## Username Criteria

- Must be between 6 and 20 characters in length
- May contain letters, numbers and periods
- Should not start or end with a period

## Password Criteria

(Ensure caps lock is deactivated. Passwords are case sensitive).

- Minimum password length is 8 characters.
- Password may not contain your Public Login Account, First Name, or Last Name.
- Password cannot have been previously used.
- Password must contain characters from three of the following categories:
  - English UPPERCASE characters (e.g., A through Z)
  - English lowercase characters (e.g., a through z)
  - Base 10 numbers (e.g., 0 through 9)
  - Non-alphabetic characters (e.g., !, @, #, \$, &)

## Tips to Create a Strong Password

- Do not use obvious passwords, like "password", "qwerty", "123456", or "password1".
- Do not use personal information, like a spouse or child's name.
- Do not write your passwords down, and do not leave them on a sticky note on your computer monitor. Doing so removes all security the password attempts to create.
- Spell words with character substitutions, such as "!!llin0i\$" instead of "Illinois".
- The longer that the password is, the harder it will be to guess or crack.
- Do not type your passwords while using public Wi-Fi. Doing so can put your data at risk for nearby hackers.
- Use phrases to your advantage. For example, instead of using "The Early Bird Gets the Worm", you can use "tebgtw". You will always associate your password with the phrase, and someone looking to crack your password will have a difficult time trying to guess your password. For added difficulty, you can integrate character substitutions into the phrase, turning "tebgtw" into "t3b6tw".
- Change your passwords regularly.
- Do not use the same password for every account.

## Public Account Portal

The screenshot shows the login page for the Illinois Authentication Portal. It features the Illinois state logo and the text "ILLINOIS.gov Authentication Portal". Below the logo, there is a section titled "Sign in with your Public account" with two input fields for "Username" and "Password". A "Sign in" button is located below these fields. To the right of the "Sign in" button, there are three links: "Reset your password", "Recover your Username", and "Create a new account". At the bottom of the page, there is a copyright notice: "© 2016 Microsoft Privacy Help".

## Create a New Account Portal

The screenshot shows the registration page for the Illinois Authentication Portal. It features the Illinois state logo and the text "ILLINOIS.gov". Below the logo, there is a section titled "Accounts > Create a new Account" and "Create a new Account". The registration form includes the following fields:

- Registration**: A note stating "Your Username can include letters, numbers, and periods (may not start or end with a period); and must be between 6 and 20 characters long. Examples: John.Smith, JSm1th".
- First Name**: Input field.
- Last Name**: Input field.
- Email Address**: Input field.
- Confirm Email Address**: Input field.
- Cell Phone (Optional)**: Input field with an example: "Example: 999-999-9999".
- Cell Carrier**: Dropdown menu with the option "- Not Supplied -".
- Choose your Username**: Input field.
- Password**: Input field with a "Password Rules" link below it.
- Confirm Password**: Input field.

At the bottom of the form, there are two buttons: "Register" and "Cancel".