KPERS Benefit Update

Why Retirees Have Not Received a Permanent Benefit Increase — and What You Can Do

At a glance

- KPERS retirees have gone without a permanent benefit increase (PBI) for 30 years.
- The cause is a large Unfunded Actuarial Liability (UAL), built up over 25 years of legislatively capped, rather than actuarially recommended, contributions.
- Retirees represent roughly 12% of Kansas's population — a meaningful voting bloc that can influence this outcome.

Why There Has Been No Permanent Benefit Increase

The Kansas Legislature sets benefit levels for all KPERS retirees and beneficiaries and controls how much the state contributes to the system each year.

KPERS has been unable to secure a permanent benefit increase because of its high Unfunded Actuarial Liability (UAL). That liability exists because, for 25 years, the state's annual KPERS contribution was set by statute rather than at the level actuaries recommended. Under K.S.A. 74-4920(8), championed by Senator Kerr, annual funding increases were capped at a fixed percentage over the prior year. That cap led to a quarter-century of underfunding, and the resulting UAL was not seriously addressed until 2019, when the practice finally stopped — seven years ago.

Who This Affects

Membership

KPERS covers 346,393 members in total — active employees, retirees, beneficiaries, inactive members, and participants in KP&F and the Judges' plan. That is about 12% of the entire Kansas population of three million, not counting spouses and dependents. This makes KPERS retirees and members a substantial voting bloc.

Of all members (active, retired, and inactive), 67.2% are female and 32.8% are male.

The Cost of Delay

Over the past 30 years without a permanent benefit increase, an estimated 73,960 retirees have passed away without ever receiving one — including 3,391 in 2025 alone and 1,150 more through May 1, 2026. Approximately 92.2% of current KPERS retirees have never received a permanent benefit increase. About 80% of retiree benefit checks are deposited with Kansas financial institutions, meaning this money largely stays within the state economy.

How Funding Requests Have Been Handled

When retirees ask the Legislature for a benefit increase, lawmakers often ask where the funding should come from. The typical response is that this is the Legislature's decision — because in the past, when retirees suggested a funding source, that money was found but redirected elsewhere, often through a “net/net” approach.

For example (using round numbers): suppose the state's annual General Fund Transfer (GFT) to KPERS is $10,000, and retirees identify an additional $5,000 in available funding. Rather than raising the GFT to $15,000,

the Legislature might apply the new $5,000 to KPERS but simultaneously reduce the base GFT by $5,000 — leaving the total contribution unchanged at $10,000.

What You Can Do

1. Register to vote, vote in every election, and encourage peers to do the same. Staying engaged protects retirees' interests.
2. Recognize the collective influence of the retiree community. KPERS membership totals 346,393 — about 12% of Kansas's population (not including spouses and dependents). That is real influence when used.
3. Contact your legislators and candidates and ask them to form a committee to study a KPERS cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). The Legislature used a similar committee process to approve a 93% salary increase for legislators and a 4.4% COLA for themselves this past January. Retirees are asking for the same consideration.

Why a Rally Is No Longer Part of the Strategy

Retiree rallies were held periodically since 2006, but that approach has been discontinued for several reasons:

- Timing: The most effective time for a rally is early February, during the legislative calendar — but Kansas weather in February is unpredictable. A storm closed the Capitol on a scheduled rally day in 2005.
- Turnout: Retirees often have more scheduling conflicts than expected.
- Rescheduling: Capitol space is in high demand, making it difficult to secure a workable make-up date after a cancellation, particularly since specific dates matter most.
- Mobility: Many retirees find travel in uncertain weather difficult, and bus transportation has become cost-prohibitive.
- Momentum: Advocacy for a benefit increase has continued since 2006, with the last successful period ending in 2009. Many have grown discouraged, but sustained legislative advocacy requires persistence — this effort cannot stop.

Related Legislative and Election Context

Special Education (SPED) Funding

Some candidates note they voted to fully fund Kansas public education, which is technically accurate but incomplete. The Kansas Supreme Court ruled that K-12 education must be fully funded, but that ruling did not extend to special education. When the Legislature passed its education funding bill over the Governor's veto, that bill did not include full SPED funding.

This matters because SPED is a federally mandated program, and states are required to fund it at 92%. Kansas currently funds SPED at approximately 62% — a substantial shortfall that the Supreme Court could not address because it fell outside the scope of the case before it.

How This Affects Local Communities

State revenue comes primarily from income tax, federal funds, and sales tax. Local cities and counties rely on a mix of state revenue sharing, property taxes, and local sales taxes. When state revenue to localities is reduced, property and sales taxes become the primary remaining sources — and the next lever available is often cutting services, including public school funding.

This directly affects SPED and other local costs: counties and municipalities may need to raise property taxes if state contributions fall short. Reduced state support for these programs tends to shift the burden to local taxpayers rather than eliminating it.

August 2026 Primary Results

Recent statewide votes provide useful context on how Kansans are voting on constitutional questions:

- Supreme Court selection amendment (August 4, 2026 primary): 61% No, 39% Yes.
- Abortion-related constitutional amendment (2022): 59% No, 41% Yes. Only 18 of Kansas's 105 counties opposed that amendment, and no county in western Kansas opposed it.
- By contrast, the 2026 Supreme Court amendment failed in 43 counties, including several along the Colorado border — indicating a broader, more geographically distributed rejection than in 2022.