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2026 General Assembly Session Begins

Now is the time that the MRSPA Legislative Committee really gets to work. The 90-day General Assembly session began on January 14, 2026. Also in January, we will hold our annual Legislative Workshop by Zoom and hold our first committee meeting of the session. Thereafter, we will meet every two weeks to review proposed legislation, continuing to look out for the interests of retired school personnel, with protection of our defined benefit pension always our top priority. Watch your email inbox throughout the session for the MRSPA Legislative Update that will show the bills the committee is following and the positions taken.

Additionally, every member of the General Assembly will receive from MRSPA an electronic letter that includes our 2026 Legislative Priorities brochure and National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS) *Pensionomics* flyer. It also contains information that both introduces the legislators to MRSPA and our priorities and clearly explains the importance of our defined benefit pension to retirees and to the economy of the state of Maryland.

One big change this year is that the House of Delegates has elected Joseline Pena-Melnyk (Prince George's, Anne Arundel) as the new Speaker of the House of Delegates to replace Adrienne Jones, who resigned as Speaker. Lots of changes have occurred in terms of the committee structure and leadership in the House as a result.

Issues that have been identified that will be dealt with by the General Assembly include the following: \$1.4 billion budget deficit; rising energy costs, and how to deal with data centers; affordability; Chesapeake Bay restoration; education, and the funding of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future; immigration; the rebuilding of the Francis Scott Key Bridge; health care, including federal changes that may affect Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act Exchange; and vaccine protocol. Because it is an election year, we do not expect tax increases to be considered.

Many of these mentioned issues are not included in our MRSPA Legislative Priorities, but your committee will keep close tabs on proposed bills to see that the priorities and interests of our members are protected.

Tom Slater,
MRSPA Legislative Committee Chair



Virginia Crespo, MRSPA Legislative
Aide; Senator Pam Beidle;
Tom Slater, MRSPA Committee Chair



Senator Cheryl Kagen and
Tom Slater



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Betty Weller

We are now moving through a new year, and as with any new year, there will be new changes. Sometimes, however, it seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. While the Maryland Retired School Personnel Association is undergoing some updates and modernization, certain aspects will stay the same. One of the biggest aspects that won't change is we are a member organization; it's members that make us who we are and members who allow us to do the things we do. In 2025, the MRSPA spent time and money in an effort to get our name out to many more people, to let them know that we exist and what we're about. Why? Over the years, how many of you have heard someone say they didn't even know there was such an organization? People must know we're here and what we do before they can think about joining. We'll continue to do so in 2026, because we need to grow our membership. You can help with the effort by sharing information with friends and colleagues, by being involved yourself and by personally inviting eligible folks that you know who aren't members to join.

Why do I continue to talk about membership? I talk about it because without it, we cease to exist, and so does all the good work we do on behalf of retired school personnel and others. It isn't only supporting legislation that helps our members and other retirees, it's raising money for scholarships, doing community service projects around the state, and getting together at social functions where we meet new colleagues, reminisce, and stay connected.

After you let people know about us, point them to our website, mrspa.org. In fact, if you haven't visited the website, take a look at it. Not only does it tell you about who we are and what we do, there's a tab that lists our various committees. You might find one that interests you! We're happy when members become active! There's a tab you shouldn't miss—it's called Benefits. You'll find lots of ways to save money (and don't we all like to do that!). Click on the tab and look at

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Editor

Debbie J. Hance

Officers

President.....Betty Weller
President-Elect.....Alice Mitchell
Vice President.....Tillie Barckley
Secretary.....Sharyn Doyle
Treasurer.....Dr. Stephen Raucher

MRSPA Business Office

8379 Piney Orchard Parkway
Suite A
Odenton, MD 21113-1508
Phone: 410-551-1517
Toll Free: 877-625-6782
Website: www.mrspa.org
Email: mrspa@mrspa.org

the options to save. Let them know if they use the benefits afforded members it will more than pay for their membership. For information about your pension, look under the Pension tab and, if you want to know what's going on during the legislative session, move over one tab to the right. A great deal of useful information can be found on the website.

As we make changes to the Association over the next 2-3 years to maintain relevancy, remember that progress isn't possible without change. John Lewis said of change, "If not us, who? If not now, when?" So, let's do it!

(Continued on page 4)

**MRSPA: Opportunities to
Advocate, Serve, and Connect**

From the

Executive Director

Wanda Ruffo Twigg



I am not a doctor, and I don't play one on TV. I am struck, however, when I read or hear about loneliness and social connection or disconnection, especially among the senior/retired population. I have not done the research, and I have surely not read all of it. I have read various articles from AARP and from the Surgeon General on the topic. I don't think it takes a doctor or rocket scientist to know that these are serious issues to be addressed.

First, loneliness and social isolation are not the same thing. Loneliness is a feeling that we all can have at various times, even when we are with other people. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. According to the Surgeon General, the mortality aspect of being socially disconnected is similar to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. A society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished. It can also cause us to retreat further into our corners, being angry, sick, and alone. Who really

wants to be angry, sick, or alone? Not this writer.

So, what can we do? We can start by strengthening the connections and relationships in our own lives. Answer that call, email, or text from a friend. Make time to share a meal. Listen without the distraction of your phone. Ask for help. Perform an act of service. Say yes to that request to join in an activity. Make plans and follow through. Take a walk with a friend or loved one. Enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells of nature.

I don't want to oversimplify this serious issue. But if you are looking for a way to get or stay connected in 2026, MRSPA and your local association are great places to start. Lots of members with shared history as well as fascinating differences and experiences are looking for someone new to meet or to rekindle an old friendship. If you don't like the idea of committing to a leadership position, just join a committee, or plan to attend a luncheon or happy hour or community service activity. Think of your local association and MRSPA as a nearby, convenient treatment for loneliness and social isolation. And you don't need to see a doctor for a prescription. Just show up. We need you.

Wishing you happiness, health, and connectivity in 2026!

Vision Statement

The Maryland Retired School Personnel Association envisions members enjoying the peace of mind of a well-earned, secure, stable, informed, dignified retirement.

Mission Statement

The ABC'S of Maryland Retired School Personnel Association (MRSPA) are to:

- **Advocate for pension protection**
- **Bring reliable information**
- **Create member connection**
- **Support school communities**

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

We, the Maryland Retired School Personnel Association, are evolving to reflect the goals and aspirations of a contemporary organization. Through our shared values, we create an environment where all members are included, respected, and appreciated.

Candidate for MRSPA Vice President 2026-2028



The MRSPA Nominating Committee presents the following information about Dr. John Bowman, II, Candidate for MRSPA Vice President. The election will be held during the Annual Business Meeting on May 5, 2026.

Local Association Positions Held:

President, Allegany County Retired School Personnel (July, 2023 to present)
Vice President, Allegany County Retired School Personnel (2021- 2023)

MRSPA Positions Held:

Chair, Bylaws Committee (2024 to present)
Member, Legislative Committee (2021 to 2024)

Work History

Dr. John Bowman is Vice Provost, Emeritus and a former professor and chair of the political science department at Frostburg State University. He retired from FSU on July 1, 2018.

While at Frostburg State University, Dr. Bowman established partnerships and cooperative degree programs with universities in Europe, China, and Taiwan.

His work to create overseas partnerships dramatically increased international student enrollment and faculty exchanges at Frostburg, enhanced the internationalization of the campus, and greatly extended the university's global presence. He has also teamed with English language schools to bring international students to Frostburg State University.

The professional and leadership background of Dr. Bowman includes planning and creating innovative campus-wide educational programs at Frostburg State University; preparing important Frostburg State University studies and documents required by the University System of Maryland, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education; and serving as the university's representative on regional community boards and planning committees.

Dr. Bowman holds an undergraduate degree in education from The Ohio State University, a master's degree in diplomacy from the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky, and a doctorate in international affairs from the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh.

John is excited about the opportunity to step further into MRSPA leadership to continue his work for MRSPA members statewide.

(President, continued from page 2)

Please think about one thing you can change like: joining a committee, becoming more active in your local, inviting a non-member to join, advocating for legislation that would lead to a better life for retired educators and others, connecting with local elected officials and establishing relationships with them, and serving others to make for a better life for everyone. With your help, the Maryland Retired School Personnel Association will become more relevant,

more influential, and will better serve our members in this new year and beyond. Thank you for your membership and for all you do. Let's make this year one of our best years ever!

**MRSPA: Opportunities to
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Annual Business Meeting Procedure Reminder

As we are preparing for the 2026 Annual Business Meeting on May 5, 2026, we want to remind delegates of the long-standing MRSPA Board Policy for making motions during the meeting. The policy is Article XI. Annual Meeting:

Motions which set policy or which require action must be submitted to the President in time to be distributed to the Board of Directors and local association presidents at least 30 days prior to the Annual Business Meeting. Motions which reverse or significantly alter current policy will be tabled for additional study until the next meeting, unless they represent an emergency. Consideration of an emergency motion requires a two-thirds majority of voting members present and a two-thirds majority for the motion to pass. No motions will be considered at the Annual Meeting unless this procedure has been followed.

For 2026, thirty days before the Annual Business Meeting is April 5. Should a delegate wish to make a motion during the Annual Meeting, this means that it must be submitted to the President well prior to April 5, 2026, to allow time for the motion to be shared with the full Board of Directors and local association presidents by April 5.

The President requests that any planned motions be submitted to the President by March 26, 2026, to allow time for sharing and consideration prior to the Annual Business Meeting in accordance with the policy.

Update to Executive Director's Message in the Winter 2025 MRSPA News

MRSPA is pleased to announce that the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System has changed course and has deferred the transition to electronic-only distribution for their newsletter and check stubs.



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Maryland Retired School Personnel Association



You will continue to receive their newsletter *Retiree News & Notes*, as well as your Automatic Deposit Advice (check stub of advice slip) in January and July of 2026 on paper via US Mail as has happened in the past. We are unsure how long the deferment will last, but will keep our members posted as we get more information.

Meanwhile, if you have the means, we recommend setting up your account in the mySRPS portal on the pension system website at www.sra.maryland.gov as described in the Winter 2025 MRSPA News. You can access a video of how to set up this account on the MRSPA website at www.mrspa.org by clicking News/Events, and then click Resources.

It's *MRSPA Foundation* Raffle Time!

The MRSPA Community Service and Scholarship Committees provide tremendous support to students and staff in our schools across Maryland. Therefore, we are seeking **donations** to the *MRSPA Foundation* so that we can continue our work. Again this year, raffle tickets will be purchased solely through the MRSPA newsletter and through local association newsletters using the form below. All donations are tax deductible and come with our thanks and appreciation!

Your name will be entered into a drawing upon receipt of your donation based on this criterion: Donations of \$10 will earn 1 raffle ticket while donations of \$25 will earn 3 raffle tickets incrementally. MRSPA staff will write your name on the correct number of tickets and send your ticket stubs to you in the US Mail when we receive your check. The drawing will take place at the May 2026 Annual Business Meeting, whether held in person or virtually. You can win the \$300 cash first prize, a Maryland-themed basket valued at \$175 second prize, or one of 5 third place themed baskets valued at \$125: Cooking, Game Night, Wine Lover, Book Worm, and Sports Lover. Out-of-state winners will receive gift cards in lieu of basket contents.



Entering the drawing is fun and easy!

1. Make your **check payable to *MRSPA Foundation*.**
2. Write ***MRSPA Foundation* Raffle** on the **FOR** line.
3. Date and **sign** your check.
4. **Mail** check and completed form to MRSPA at 8379 Piney Orchard Parkway, Suite A, Odenton, MD 21113 **before March 20, 2026.**

Will you send a donation today?



MRSPA Foundation

Your Name: _____

Your Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

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BILL LEWIS



"In-person classes provide an invigorating opportunity to socialize with other members, not only in class but over lunch or coffee. The Zoom classes are convenient and allow us to learn from instructors who are outside the Washington metropolitan area—as far away as Pennsylvania and California."

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MRSPA CALENDAR

February 16.....Presidents' Day
MRSPA Office Closed

March 10.....Board of Directors Meeting
Hybrid

March 17.....Local Presidents Meeting
Virtual

April 3 - 6.....Spring Break
MRSPA Office Closed

April 13.....Sine Die, End of G.A. Session
Annapolis

May 5.....Annual Business Meeting
Turf Valley, Ellicott City



MRSPA TRIPS AND TRAVEL 2025-2026



British Landscapes: England, Scotland, Wales, April 14, 2026, Collette Tours via Travel Leaders/Action Travel, Leigh Ann Keller, 301-843-0887. <https://shorturl.at/wjH4O>

Canadian Rockies via Rail, June 17, 2026, Premier World Discovery, 877-953-8687.
<https://shorturl.at/0G70r>

Iceland: Land of Fire & Ice, August 7, 2026, Mayflower Cruises & Tours, Liz Unger at 443-904-4540, or Tim Landoli at 386-569-7365. <https://shorturl.at/ubXSr>

Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta, October 2, 2026, Premier World Discovery, 877-953-8687.
<https://tinyurl.com/tn8uuasj>

Canada & New England, October 8-17, 2026, Grand American Tours, 800-423-0247.
<https://shorturl.at/zBPb5>

Hawaii, October 31– November 7, 2026, Grand American Tours, 800-423-0247.
<https://shorturl.at/cwRmf>

Check our website at www.mrspa.org, click *Travel* to locate more information on trips.

All MRSPA trips are open to MRSPA members, their family and friends. Please use **Code: G5-28192 anytime** you travel with Grand Circle Tours to access a special deal for you and MRSPA, even if it's not a MRSPA sponsored trip.