

Pathways to Retirement

March 2025
Vol. 36, No. 1

LOS ANGELES COUNTY EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION



Supporting You Through the Wildfire Recovery

A Message From CEO Santos H. Kreimann

Dear members: LACERA remains acutely aware of the immense challenges faced by our active members and the entire Los Angeles region in the wake of the devastating January wildfires. We mourn the loss of lives, homes, community spaces, and our sense of security. Yet amidst this tragedy, we are moved by the bravery and compassion of those who fought the fires, evacuated residents, cared for displaced families, provided essential services, and donated generously. On behalf of LACERA's Boards, executive team, and staff members, a heartfelt **thank-you** to our members and the countless volunteers who have stepped up to help, bringing hope and light during dark times.

You Can Count on LACERA

I want you to know that during this emergency, our organization remained responsive to members due to our remote capabilities, business continuity planning, and—most importantly—the all-hands-on-deck approach of our staff members. They worked tirelessly to help members and each

other, some while experiencing losses of their own. I'm inspired and humbled by their generosity, strength, and dedication.

As we transition from grief to recovery, LACERA stands firm in our commitment to fulfill our mission of producing, protecting, and providing your promised benefits—now and into the future. You can rely on and reach out to us for:

- **Ongoing support for relocated/displaced members:** We will work with you to ensure you receive your LACERA benefits and can provide resource information for any additional assistance you may need. LACERA is just a phone call away at 800-786-6464.
- **Uninterrupted service and benefits:** Our flexible operations and remote capabilities mean that even in times of crisis, LACERA can conduct regular business and provide service.
- **Access to knowledgeable, caring staff:** Our dedicated benefits specialists are ready to help you with benefits questions, pre-retirement transactions, and retirement counseling and processing. For assistance,

Cont. on pg. 2

IN THIS ISSUE



Victory! Social Security WEP/GPO Penalties Repealed

2



Update for Plan G and Safety C Members

3



LACERA Accomplishments

4

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Recognizing Your Service

5

Supporting You, cont. from cover

call us at 800-786-6464, visit lacera.com to make an in-person or virtual appointment, or log in to My LACERA to send us a secure message.

- **Financial security:** LACERA's investment portfolio is resilient because it is diversified. Despite the wildfire devastation, there is no significant impact on capital markets or our portfolio. Our diversified, long-term investment strategy aims to maintain stability and growth, preserving value despite market fluctuations and global events. These tragic events will not impact our ability to provide the promised benefits.

Since LACERA's founding 87 years ago, we have stood steadfast and strong through the most challenging days

and disasters impacting Southern California. We pledge to continue fulfilling our commitment to you, and we thank you for your trust in LACERA. Let's continue supporting each other as we begin the hard work of rebuilding our neighborhoods and healing our community.

Stay safe and strong.



Disaster Relief From the County Assessor's Office

The Assessor's Office is providing assistance for property owners affected by the January wildfires. For reassessment and tax relief information and forms, visit www.assessor.lacounty.gov/tax-relief/disaster-relief.

BOARD OF RETIREMENT

LES ROBBINS

Chair

Elected by Retired Members

RONALD OKUM

Vice Chair

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

SHAWN R. KEHOE

Secretary

Alternate Trustee

Elected by Safety Members

NANCY M. DURAZO

Elected by General Members

ELIZABETH B. GINSBERG

County Treasurer and Tax Collector

Ex-Officio Trustee

JASON E. GREEN

Elected by Safety Members

JAMES P. HARRIS

Alternate Trustee

Elected by Retired Members

ALEEN LANGTON

Elected by General Members

WAYNE MOORE

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

LISA PROFT

Chief Deputy County Treasurer and

Tax Collector

Acting Ex-Officio Trustee*

DAVID E. RYU

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

BOARD OF INVESTMENTS

JASON E. GREEN

Chair

Elected by Safety Members

PATRICK L. JONES

Vice Chair

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

DAVID E. RYU

Secretary

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

MIKE GATTO

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

ELIZABETH B. GINSBERG

County Treasurer and Tax Collector

Ex-Officio Trustee

ALEEN LANGTON

Elected by General Members

DEBBIE MARTIN

Elected by Retired Members

ALMA K. MARTINEZ

Appointed by Board of Supervisors

NICOLE MI

Elected by General Members

LISA PROFT

Chief Deputy County Treasurer and

Tax Collector

Acting Ex-Officio Trustee*

*When ex-officio trustee is absent

Victory! Social Security WEP/GPO Penalties Repealed

On January 5, 2025, (now former) President Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act into law, legislation that will repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO).

This repeal marks a significant victory for LACERA retirees—both those currently impacted by the WEP/GPO penalties as well as future LACERA retirees who will receive the full Social Security benefits to which they are entitled.

What Happens Next?

The effective date for the WEP/GPO repeal for those receiving Social Security benefits is January 2024. In his January 5th remarks, Biden announced that in addition to full monthly benefits, affected retirees will receive lump-sum payments retroactive to January 2024. If you are a retiring member who is subject to the WEP or GPO, you do not need to take action at this time. Once the law is implemented, Social Security will automatically apply the changes and make any additional payments.

As of the end of January 2025, **LACERA has not become aware of any implementation plan released by the Social Security Administration.** Visit the Social Security website for WEP/GPO updates at www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/social-security-fairness-act.html.

More About the WEP/GPO Repeal

Since 1983, the WEP has reduced the Social Security benefits for workers who receive a

pension but who also qualified for benefits under the Social Security system (e.g., County workers employed before 1983 or LACERA members who were formerly employed in the private sector). Since 1977, the GPO has reduced Social Security benefits for spouses, widows, or widowers who also receive a government pension by 2/3rds of their pension amount, sometimes eliminating the Social Security benefit completely.

The repeal of the WEP/GPO penalties comes after decades of efforts by public pension plans and public sector unions. Why did it take so long? Legislation to repeal the WEP/GPO has been successively introduced since 2001 and historically garnered bipartisan support, but it was never brought up for a vote. Frustrated with inaction on the legislation, the bill's chief House sponsors led an effort to use the House's rules to discharge the bill from the Ways and Means Committee and bring it to the full House for a direct vote. On September 19, 2024, the cosigners of the discharge petition reached the crucial threshold of 218 signatures, a simple majority in the House. This paved the way for House passage of the bill (327 to 75) on November 12, 2024, and subsequent transmission to the Senate, where it passed in a historic vote (76 to 20) on December 21, 2024.

Over the years, LACERA has been in contact with every House member and senator, urging for support of this repeal. Up to the final congressional votes, LACERA was a consistent advocate on behalf of its 187,000 members and beneficiaries.

Good News for Plans G and Safety C LACERA Changes Final Average Compensation Calculation Method for PEPRA Plans

LACERA has made a significant change to the final average compensation (FAC) calculation method for Plans G and Safety C, plans created to address requirements of the Public Employees' Pension Reform Act of 2013 (PEPRA). This change is expected to **benefit PEPRA members** who retired before March 1, 2025 and had absences without pay that decreased their FAC, and future retirees whose calculations will not be affected by such absences.

Effective March 1, 2025, all FAC calculations will be based on a member's **scheduled** pensionable compensation rather than **actual** pensionable earnings. What's the difference? The scheduled amount is the member's regular base pay, and what they receive if there are no periods of absence without pay within a pay period. The actual amount is the member's take-home earnings. If that member has any kind of absence that results in earning less than the scheduled amount within that pay period, it can affect their FAC calculation at retirement if the FAC is based on actual earnings.

This change **does not impact active (working) or deferred members**. When you retire, your FAC will be based on your scheduled earnings. There is no effect on your paycheck and there are no changes to your contributions.

If you are in process of retiring, **you do not need to change your retirement date** based on this calculation change. All retirements processed after March 1, 2025 will use the new scheduled earnings formula. LACERA is recalculating the FACs for all PEPRA members with unpaid absences who retired prior to March 1, 2025. If a recalculation results in a higher FAC and monthly benefit, LACERA will contact affected members with more details and make retroactive payments.

Background on PEPRA FACs and Justification for Change

PEPRA plans calculate the FAC using the highest three consecutive years of earnings, differing from LACERA's legacy plans, which use a 12-month window (except Plan E). The FAC is a key factor in determining your monthly retirement allowance, which is a percentage of your salary depending on your age and years of service.

LACERA is committed to ensuring that member benefits are calculated accurately and fairly in compliance with the laws and regulations that apply to our plans. When PEPRA was implemented, LACERA interpreted the legislation to mean actual earnings should be used for calculating PEPRA member FACs. However, over time, staff members have identified an inconsistent application under the following scenario.

If a PEPRA plan member applies for service retirement and has an entire pay period with zero pay due to an unpaid absence, LACERA calculates their FAC using a rule that substitutes scheduled earnings for that period. However, if a PEPRA member has partial earnings (in which they both worked and had an absence without pay within the same pay period), their FAC is calculated using their actual earnings. This creates an unfair situation where a member with a partial earnings period would have a lower FAC (and consequently, a lower monthly benefit) than a member who had a zero-earnings pay period.

This inconsistency triggered an extensive review and change to our interpretation of PEPRA regulations. This change to using scheduled earnings for all FACs results in fairer FAC calculations for all PEPRA members, and it is consistent with how members pay contributions (which are based on scheduled earnings); how LACERA calculates legacy plan FACs; how our peer plans calculate PEPRA FACs; and how our actuarial projections are calculated. It is also supported by fiduciary and tax counsel.

There's a Webinar for You—Join Us!

It's always the right time to prepare for retirement, regardless of your career stage! LACERA partners with Empower to host workshops and webinars to help you plan for your future. To take a look and register online, visit [lacera.com](https://www.lacera.com), then click on the **Resource Center** tile on the homepage to access the **Workshop Schedule** page. We look forward to seeing you soon!

- **New Hire Orientations** are held on the first Wednesday of each month (plus additional Wednesdays to meet demand), in partnership with Empower. This workshop is geared toward new and recent hires (those who have been working for L.A. County for less than two years since their hire date) and for other employees who want a refresher on how their pension and 457(b) or 401(k) plans work. If you haven't attended a new hire workshop, we highly recommend it!



- **Mid-Career seminars** are held on the first Thursday of each month, co-presented with Empower. This seminar is for members in the early to mid-stages of their careers who want to make sure they are on the right track for retirement. Topics include eligibility requirements for retirement, what a plan transfer does for you, how buying service can enhance your retirement, and what happens when you leave service.
- **Pre-Retirement and Retiree Healthcare workshops** are held every Tuesday (except for Tuesdays immediately following a holiday), in partnership with Empower. These comprehensive workshops offer valuable retirement strategies and benefits information to help you prepare for a financially secure future, including an overview of medical, dental/vision, and long-term care insurance.

Other workshops offered on a rotating basis include: the LACERA Special Durable Power of Attorney, My LACERA navigation, Retirement Options, Active and Retired Death Benefits, and a variety of mini-webinars hosted by Empower.



LACERA Accomplishments

Board Updates



Alma Martinez

In January, LACERA welcomed Trustee **Alma Martinez**, appointed by Supervisor Solis, to the Board of Investments. Ms. Martinez has served as City Manager for the City of El Monte since 2019—the first woman and first Latina to hold this position—where she oversees day-to-day operations. She has previously served as the Assistant City Manager for the City of El Monte; City Manager for the City of Lynwood; and Assistant City Manager for the City of Compton.

Ms. Martinez earned a master’s degree in urban planning from the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Her areas of expertise include building private-public relationships, identifying development opportunities, managing development projects, and applying public financing tools to revitalization efforts.

Also in January, Trustee **Aleen Langton**, elected by general members to the third seat on both boards in 2024, began her full three-year terms. Ms. Langton had already taken her seat on the Board of Investments (BOI) in October 2024.

Notable Retirement



Ms. Gray’s last Board of Retirement meeting as a trustee on December 4, 2024. L to R: CEO Santos Kreimann and Trustees Wayne Moore, Elizabeth Ginsberg, Shawn Kehoe, Antonio Sanchez, Vivian Gray, J.P. Harris, Les Robbins, David Ryu, Ronald Okum, Jason Green, and Nancy Durazo.

On December 31, 2024, Trustee **Vivian Gray** retired from the Board of Retirement (BOR). Ms. Gray was elected by general members to four consecutive terms, beginning her first term January 1, 2013. Her advocacy and leadership on the board will be greatly missed. LACERA thanks Ms. Gray for her dedicated service to the community and LACERA’s members during her long career.

We also extend our gratitude to appointed Trustees **Antonio Sanchez** (BOR) and **Trevor Fay** (BOI) for their service on the boards. Both completed their terms at the end of 2024.

“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success.”
- Albert Schweitzer

Highlight on Armenian History Month

This April, LACERA celebrates Armenian History Month — honoring the rich cultural roots and contributions of the Armenian community. With over 200,000 Armenian Americans calling Los Angeles home, the county has become a haven for Armenian culture.

Community staples like the St. Mary’s Armenian Apostolic Church and Glendale Central Library host lectures, workshops, and storytelling events that highlight Armenian heritage. Meanwhile, restaurants delight Angelenos with Armenian dishes like khorovats (grilled meats), dolma (stuffed grape leaves), manti (dumplings), lahmajun (pizza), and baklava.

This month also serves as a time for reflection. Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, April 24, honors the lives lost and recognizes the resilience of the Armenian people. Through reflection and remembrance, this day underscores the enduring spirit of the Armenian community that continues to enrich Los Angeles.

Sources: www.lacountylibrary.org, www.armenian-history.com

More Heritage Months

March

- Women’s History Month
- Gender Equality Month
- Irish American Heritage Month
- Greek American Heritage Month

April

- Arab American Heritage Month
- Scottish American Heritage Month

May

- Military Appreciation Month
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month
- Jewish American Heritage Month
- Older Americans Month

LACERA has nearly 100,000 active members working across dozens of County departments. Because it's important to recognize their contributions, we are allocating space in every issue to get to know some of our hard-working members and find out more about what they do. While there are more deserving stories than we could ever tell in this space, know that we are grateful to all of you for making L.A. County a better place!

Theresa Mitchell **Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney, Healthcare Fraud Division**

Theresa Mitchell retired in October 2024 after 37 years of service in the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. She discovered her talent for prosecution while taking a trial advocacy course in law school (where she helped convict her brother in a mock trial!).

That newfound passion led Mitchell to begin her career as a law clerk for the District Attorney's Office in 1987. Over the years, she progressed steadily, eventually to the position of Deputy District Attorney in the Healthcare Fraud Division. In this role, Theresa handled a variety of complex insurance fraud cases—ranging from smaller crimes to multimillion-dollar cases.

Throughout her decorated career, Mitchell says her most rewarding moments have been the gratitude expressed by families of victims following a guilty verdict.

Mitchell's retirement plans include traveling to Wales, getting back into golfing, and adopting a rescue dog to join her on hikes.

Garrett Schiaretti **Captain, L.A. County Fire Department**

Garrett Schiaretti retired on September 30, 2024, after a 32-year career with the L.A. County Fire Department. He started as a firefighter with the Pomona Fire Department, staying on for his whole career when the city transitioned services to L.A. County in 1994. He rose through the ranks to engineer in 2000, and captain in 2013.



Firefighting was somewhat of a calling for Schiaretti, who as a youth was inspired by his neighbor, a fire chief for the Montclair Fire Department. That early influence sparked his passion for public service and paved the way for his proudest career accomplishment: seeing his three sons follow in his footsteps and join the fire service.

In retirement, Schiaretti looks forward to spending time exploring Europe with his wife. Once they return, he plans to complete home renovations and enjoy his favorite pastimes, including golfing, boating, hiking, and taking road trips in his travel trailer.

Tristan Biller **Union Journeyman Carpenter, Facilities Department, LAC+USC Medical Center**

Tristan Biller is preparing to retire in March after more than 20 years of service to Los Angeles County. His career began in Hawaii, where he completed an apprenticeship program and earned the title of Master Carpenter. Biller then moved to Los Angeles, beginning his County career as a carpenter for the Los Angeles County museums.

Over the last two decades, Biller has served as a union journey carpenter at LAC+USC Medical Center's emergency department, where he is also a member of the bio-hazmat team. He has chosen to stay at the journeyman level to continue providing the hands-on craftsmanship he loves.

In retirement, Biller plans to focus on sculpting and surfing—passions as he views as a way of life. He hopes to connect with others through sharing his art and creativity.



3 Things: Daylight Saving Time

Daylight Saving Time (DST) is more than just changing your clocks twice a year. It has a fascinating origin story that you may not be aware of. (Bonus fact: The proper name is Daylight **Saving** Time, not Savings.) Here are three other facts to enlighten you about DST.



DST was first introduced during World War I to conserve

fuel. By shifting daylight into the evening hours, people could keep their lights off longer, meaning less energy consumption and more productivity.



It's a common misconception that DST was designed for farmers. In

fact, farmers were among the loudest critics, arguing that crops and livestock would be negatively affected by the time change.



One unexpected beneficiary of DST has been the golf industry. Longer evening

daylight means more rounds played, which translates into millions of dollars in extra revenue for golf courses. One study from the 1980s estimated that extending DST by just one month would boost revenue by \$400 million!

Sources: www.defense.gov, www.fb.org, www.golfweek.com

+1 H
SPRING
FORWARD



-1 H
FALL
BACK



Resolve Conflict and Create Harmony: County Mediation Program Seeks Volunteers

The Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs is seeking volunteers (unpaid) to assist in the County's mediation program. This opportunity is great for retirees or individuals working part-time who can accommodate a 12-month commitment (program not available for full-time employees). This unique experience provides the opportunity for mediation case support services alongside other volunteers. Once the foundation is set, volunteers will be provided with an opportunity to partake in 25-hour Mediation Certification training to then be able to independently mediate and resolve disputes in our local communities.

Minimum requirements for Dispute Resolution Program volunteers:

- Application packet submission, interview, and live scan clearance

- Commitment to one-year assignment, twice a week, with a minimum 4 hours per shift
- Basic computer skills like the ability to log in and navigate between applications
- Ability to listen and write notes objectively
- Comfortable communicating with others verbally and through email as well as suggesting potential confidential agreements (after 25-hour training)

If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity, please email your cover letter with your resume to DRPAVolunteer@dcba.lacounty.gov no later than May 30, 2025.



Hygiene Product Drive to Help the Unhoused Population

The L.A. County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) is coordinating its Help Everyone Reach Others (HERO) campaign, which entails collecting personal care items such as feminine hygiene products, toilet paper, wipes, dental items, new socks, etc., to create care kits and provide



them to shelters and unhoused persons. This campaign runs annually from April to May and is a great way to help those in need of the basics. Email dpssvolunteers@dpss.lacounty.gov for more information about the list of acceptable donations and how to participate.

We're Here for You and Ready to Help

Empower is aware of the devastating wildfires in the Los Angeles area and the effect they may be having on L.A. County employees. Please know, Empower remains committed to answering any questions you may have about accessing your account under these emergency circumstances.

For participants experiencing wildfire emergencies who would like to take an eligible withdrawal from your retirement plan:

- Visit www.countyla.com, log in to your account, and click *Account-> Withdrawals*.
 - o To expedite a withdrawal from your account, add and/or verify your banking information today. Click *Account -> Overview*, then click *Manage bank accounts*.
- Call us at **800-947-0845** for more information on how we can help or say “request a withdrawal” to speak to a live representative. Empower representatives are available Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. - 7 p.m. PT, Saturday from 6 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. PT, and the automated system is available 24/7.

Are You Retiring Within the Next Five Years?

For many people, the years just prior to retirement can be a reality check. They discover that they may face a gap between the retirement income they want and the actual income they can expect. If you find yourself in this situation, try not to panic. The 457(b) Horizons and/or 401(k) Savings Plans offer some additional ways to increase your savings up to your retirement:

- **Age 50+ catch-up contributions:** In the year you reach age 50, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) raises the limit on how much you can contribute to your Plan each year (known as the age 50+ catch-up contribution). If you qualify, you can contribute an additional \$7,500 in 2025.
- **Age 60-63 catch-up contributions:** In the years you turn ages 60, 61, 62, and 63 you are able to save an additional \$10,000 or 150% of the annual limit, whichever is greater. For 2025, you may contribute an additional \$11,250.
- **Three-year catch-up contributions:** Only available in the 457(b) Plans. If you are within three calendar years of normal retirement age, as defined by the Plan, you may be able to contribute even more-up to \$47,000 in 2025-with the three-year catch-up provision.
 - o **Application deadline:** Participants must apply for

three-year catch-up contributions at least 4-6 months in advance of the desired start date.

To apply, contact the Pasadena local office at **800-947-0845**.

Please note: You may only participate in one catch-up option per calendar year.

- **Contributing your termination pay:** Your final paycheck from the County can add a boost to your retirement savings. You may be able to contribute the payout of any unused vacation, sick leave, non-elective leave, and holiday pay to your account, up to the annual limit.
 - o **Application deadline:** Participants must apply for termination pay deferral 90 days in advance of the desired retirement date. To apply, contact the Pasadena local office at **800-947-0845**. The termination pay form must be received and in good working order in the Pasadena office at least 90 days in advance of the retirement date.

Not sure where you are on your road to retirement? Consider signing up for a Comprehensive Account Review (CAR). During your CAR, a Retirement Plan Counselor will help you determine your retirement income goals and how to reach those goals. You can sign up for one today by calling the local Pasadena office, **800-947-0845**.

Attention: Share Your Thoughts!

The County has teamed up with Empower to survey our 457(b) Horizons and/or 401(k) Savings Plan participants. This survey is voluntary and confidential.

This is your opportunity to tell us how you feel about the 457(b) Horizons and/or 401(k) Savings Plans. Your feedback helps the County and Empower identify what services to provide and what products may help you during your retirement years.

Thank you for helping us to identify better ways to serve you and meet your needs.

Use the URL below or scan the QR code to take the survey!

www.surveymonkey.com/r/2025COLASurvey



"EMPOWER" and all associated logos and product names are trademarks of Empower Annuity Insurance Company of America. Securities, when presented, are offered and/or distributed by Empower Financial Services, Inc., Member FINRA/SIPC. EFSI is an affiliate of Empower Retirement, LLC; Empower Funds, Inc.; and registered investment adviser Empower Advisory Group, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only and is not intended to provide investment, legal, or tax recommendations or advice.

©2025 Empower Annuity Insurance Company of America. All rights reserved. RO3232997-1223



HOW TO CONNECT WITH US

Call Us

M – F, 7 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. (PT)
800-786-6464

Log in to Your Account

Visit lacera.com and click on the green My LACERA button at the top right of any page.

Make an Appointment

We offer virtual and in-person services. Visit lacera.com and click “Appointment Reservations.”

Email Us

Retirement info: welcome@lacera.com
Retiree Healthcare: healthcare@lacera.com
To send a secure email, log in to your My LACERA account.



Visit Us Online

lacera.com

Mail Us

LACERA
PO Box 7060
Pasadena, CA 91109-7060

Drop Off Documents

Our secure onsite mailbox is available 24/7 at 300 N. Lake in Pasadena. It is located outside, to the right of the lobby doors nearest the Member Service Center.

Upcoming Holidays

LACERA will be closed on:

**Monday,
March 31**
For Cesar Chavez Day

**Monday,
May 26**
For Memorial Day

Email: welcome@lacera.com

Editor's Note: *Pathways to Retirement* is published by the staff of LACERA and is for general informational purposes only. Consult with professional advisors regarding legal, tax, and/or medical matters; LACERA does not offer legal, tax, or medical advice.

Senior Editor: Sarah Scott **Contributing Writers:** Sarah Scott, Erick Hernandez **Design:** Steve Salinas