

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
STATE EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF ILLINOIS

October 15, 2025

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the State Employees' Retirement System of Illinois was held on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, at 8:45 a.m. in the System's Springfield office at 2101 S. Veterans Parkway.

Committee Members Present:

Marvin Becker, Chairperson
Arnold Black, Vice-Chairperson
Timothy Blair, Executive Secretary

Others Present:

Jeff Houch, Associate Executive Secretary
Cory Mitchell, Manager, Claims Division
Samantha Goetz, General Counsel
Jessica Blood, Recording Secretary
Aaron Evans, Attorney, Sorling Northrup
Stacie Merano, Claimant

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Chairperson Becker presented the minutes of the Executive Committee's meeting on September 11, 2025, for approval. Copies of the minutes were previously emailed to Committee members for review. Executive Secretary Blair moved to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairperson Black and passed unanimously.

Routine Claims Report

The Routine Claims Report for September 2025 was presented. Following a brief discussion, the Routine Claims Report for September 2025, as prepared by staff, was received by the Committee.

Old Business

Dennis Austin – Appeal Overpayment of Disability Benefits – Recommendation

Dennis Austin works for the Department of Corrections. He suffered occupational injuries on March 16, 2017, August 30, 2019, and March 14, 2020. He received 7T

occupational benefits and TTD benefits from Workers' Compensation (WC) in 2017 and 2020.

In December of 2020, SERS received an Arbitrator's decision settling Mr. Austin's claim. The Disability Section converted him from a 7T benefit to a 7N benefit and started offsetting the WC settlement. The net settlement was fully offset in June 2021. From July 2021, SERS paid Mr. Austin the full 75% benefit.

In December of 2024, SERS received an IWCC Decision and Opinion on Review, which awarded Mr. Austin TPD benefits from June 16, 2020, through January 20, 2023. He also received PPD benefits for 150 weeks for permanency.

In reviewing Mr. Austin's file, it was discovered that the Arbitrator's decision was for a 2019 injury, not the March 2020 injury. Mr. Austin had been receiving TTD benefits on his March 14, 2020 injury and 75% occupational benefit from SERS at the same time.

Because the statutes do not allow SERS to collect on any mistake made greater than three years, SERS calculated an overpayment of TTD from June 16, 2020 to November 30, 2020 due to a TTD rate change. Staff converted the 7N paid, back to a 7T from December 1, 2020, through January 20, 2023, when TTD benefits ended.

Because SERS just received a settlement on the current file, with PPD starting January 21, 2023, SERS did adjust the 7N paid from January 21, 2023 to present. This adjustment created an overpayment of benefits. Mr. Austin's benefit ended March 31, 2025, and he received his last disability check in April 2025. His retirement effective date is July 1, 2025.

Mr. Austin participated in a personal hearing appeal and disputed the overpayment. His presentation summarized the details of his working related disability, his Workers' Compensation award and related process in obtaining such payment, He also stated that he received multiple letters from SERS stating he would receive a specific benefit amount until March 31, 2025 and then he could retire. He contends that he should have received that amount and should not owe any overpayment to SERS.

Following a review of the information provided at their September 11, 2025 meeting, the Committee referred Mr. Austin's case to external counsel for a recommendation.

Attorney Evans presented Recommendation No. 2025-9, to deny Mr. Austin's appeal. Following a brief discussion, Chairperson Becker moved to adopt Recommendation No. 2025-9. The motion was seconded by Executive Secretary Blair and passed unanimously.

New Business

Kathleen Whalen – Appeal Denial of Nonoccupational Disability Benefits – Personal Hearing via Teleconference – 9:00 a.m.

Kathleen Whalen worked for the Department of Human Services as an Office Associate II. She last worked on January 29, 2021, when she went on family responsibility leave. On February 1, 2022, she applied for a nonoccupational leave of absence.

Ms. Whalen alleged disability and submitted the Medical Report Form, but this form was insufficient to determine disability. SERS staff mailed Ms. Whalen a letter requesting that she submit additional medical evidence to support her claim. She never supplied records and her claim was purged.

Ms. Whalen never returned to work. SERS recently received another application from Ms. Whalen for nonoccupational disability benefits alleging that since July 2024 she is experiencing additional disabling conditions.

It was explained to Ms. Whalen that the plan design requires that a member be found disabled at the time of their leave of absence, see Title 80, Section 1540.80 (I) of the Illinois Administrative Code. She was told that to receive a benefit, she would have to supply medical evidence back to her original filing date to present and that these records would have to be sufficient to find her mentally or physically incapacitated from performing her job duties.

Ms. Whalen supplied medical records from 2021 through May 2025. Her file was sent to SERS' medical consultants for a disability determination. MMRO found that Ms. Whalen is disabled and determined that the medical evidence supported an onset of July 2024. Therefore, her claim remains denied.

Ms. Whalen is appealing against the denial of her disability claim.

Jeff Houch, Associate Executive Secretary, informed the Committee that Ms. Whalen had requested to defer her appeal.

Stacie Merano – Appeal Overpayment of Occupational Disability Benefits – Personal Hearing – Springfield – 10:30 a.m.

Stacie Merano worked for the Illinois State Police. She went on Occupational disability leave in November 2005 due to disabling conditions.

An IDES report showed that Ms. Merano exceeded the quarterly earnings limitation in the 2nd quarter of 2025. According to this report, she was working for Carlinville and Bunker Hill school districts.

An overpayment was set up for her pay that exceeded the earnings limitation, and Ms. Merano was sent a letter and an Earnings Agreement to sign and return.

Ms. Merano appealed the overpayment by personal hearing. She states she has been able to work as a substitute teacher and doesn't have consistent employment. She doesn't always work every quarter, and she doesn't get any work during the summer months. She would like her earnings to be considered over the years instead of

quarterly.

After hearing Ms. Merano present her appeal and discussing the facts presented, the Committee referred her case to external counsel for a recommendation.

John Halas – Appeal for 20-Year Pension Benefits with Insufficient Service Credit

John Halas has been out on occupational disability benefits since October 2020. The occupational disability is ceasing November 1, 2025 under 40 ILCS 14-132(b)(4) as it will be the end of the month following the fifth anniversary of the effective date of the benefit. Mr. Halas is looking to retire. He is Tier 1 with 18.7916 years with SERS.

Mr. Halas is appealing his 18.7916 years, stating that he deserves his “full 20-year pension benefits.” Mr. Halas states he is totally disabled and unable to return to work. He will be unable to work to gain his 20 years. He believes he should get his full 20-year pension benefits because he has served enough of his time to qualify for a 20-year pension with full benefits. He had a good attendance record, was a loyal and dedicated employee, and due to his severe injury, he deserves to retire with 20 years of service.

SERS staff denied his request because they are unable to approve these requests as they are contrary to the statutory plan design, see 40 ILCS 5/14-107, 40 ILCS 5/14-108, and 40 ILCS 5/14-110(a). 40 ILCS 5/1-109(d) prohibits those obligated with fiduciary duties from enacting decisions which deviate from statutory plan.

Following a review of the facts presented, Executive Secretary Blair moved to deny Mr. Halas’ appeal. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairperson Black and passed unanimously.

Rusty Downs – Appeal FAC Calculation Amount

Rusty Downs received occupational disability benefits from July 1, 2006 through April 30, 2025. Mr. Downs disability benefit met the maximum time allowed on April 30, 2025 because he turned age 65. He was notified and was told he was eligible for a retirement annuity. Mr. Downs has applied for retirement and had been speaking with a field services counselor who informed him that his retirement annuity would be based on his rate of compensation at the time he took leave.

Mr. Downs final average compensation (FAC) is determined under 40 ILCS 5/14-103.12(a) obtained by dividing the total compensation of an employee during the period of the 48 consecutive months of service within the last 120 months of service. His monthly credited earnings while on disability were \$3,660 and reflect his rate of compensation at the time of his leave is pursuant to 40 ILCS 5/14-127. Because he received disability benefits for approximately 19 years, his monthly FAC is \$3,366.00.

Mr. Downs is appealing the amount, stating that his credited earnings used to calculate his FAC for his pension should include contractual pay raises associated with his last position in lieu of the compensation that was credited to his account while on disability.

He has requested a written appeal of his FAC calculation amount.

After discussing the information provided, Executive Secretary Blair moved to deny Mr. Downs' appeal. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairperson Black and passed unanimously.

Rosemary Coleman – Appeal Overpayment of Survivors' Annuity Benefits

Member Arthur Coleman is deceased with a survivor benefit being paid to his spouse, Rosemary Coleman. Ms. Coleman started receiving a survivor's annuity benefit in 2020 at the age of 55.

In accordance with Section 14-121 of the Pension Code, a survivor's annuity shall be reduced by half of the survivors' benefits that the beneficiaries are eligible for under the federal Social Security Act. The amount of the offset shall not exceed 50% of the amount of the survivor's annuity otherwise payable to ensure they receive at least 25% of the member's final pension amount.

Ms. Coleman turned 60 and her survivor annuity benefits should have been reduced for this offset effective on her date of birth. The required adjustment then created an overpayment of benefits.

Ms. Coleman is requesting a written appeal denying an overpayment because SSA told her they don't see anything in their system and that she is not receiving SSA benefits at this time.

After reviewing the facts presented and some discussion, Executive Secretary Blair moved to deny Ms. Coleman's appeal. The motion was seconded by Chairperson Becker and passed unanimously.

Jason Davis – Appeal Denial of COLA Buyout Option

Jason Davis is a Tier 1 member who elected to retire May 1, 2025. Mr. Davis was sent an application for the COLA buyout option for his retirement benefit. Mr. Davis checked the "no" box when asked if he elected the buyout option on May 9, 2025. However, Mr. Davis did fill out the application portion providing the financial institution information for rollover of funds.

Mr. Davis's first payment of his retirement benefit was paid on June 25, 2025. On September 19, 2025 it came to Mr. Davis's attention that he declined the COLA buyout on his application but stated his intention was to elect the buyout, hence the inclusion of the financial institution information on the application.

Admin. Code tit. 80 §1540.395 establishes policies specific to SERS and the accelerated pension benefit payment options. According to section h), the election to receive an accelerated pension benefit payment under the Code becomes irrevocable on either the

date the member cashes or deposits the first retirement annuity payment, or the date on which the accelerated pension benefit payment is vouchered, whichever occurs earlier.

Mr. Davis is requesting a written appeal of his COLA denial benefits as the buyout is a crucial component of his retirement planning

Following a review of the details of Mr. Davis's case, Vice-Chairperson Black moved to deny his appeal. The motion was seconded by Executive Secretary Blair and passed unanimously.

Loleta Black – Appeal to Waive Overpayment of Nonoccupational Disability Benefits

Loleta Black works for the Department of Human Services as a Human Services Caseworker. She started receiving a nonoccupational benefit from SERS on July 27, 2024.

Ms. Black was approved for Social Security disability benefits, effective July 1, 2024, which created an overpayment of SERS disability benefits.

Ms. Black is requesting a written appeal to the Executive Committee. She would like SER to waive her SSA overpayment due to hardship. She states she is already struggling and doesn't see why SERS must take her other income. Ms. Black already has an overpayment due to converting a past Temporary benefit to an Occupational benefit.

After reviewing the facts of the case, Executive Secretary Blair moved to deny Ms. Black's appeal. The motion was seconded by Chairperson Becker and passed unanimously.

Tia Burress – Appeal to Waive Overpayment of Nonoccupational Disability Benefits

Tia Burress went out on disability benefit leave May 12, 2025. She had a return-to-work date expected June 23, 2025 on her application; however, she called SERS' call center on August 1, 2025 and stated her return-to-work date was July 23, 2025. Ms. Burress went back on payroll effective June 24, 2025 and staff confirmed with IDES, but Ms. Burress failed to tell SERS she had returned.

Ms. Burress was then overpaid the disability benefit June 24, 2025 through June 30, 2025. SERS cannot pay a member disability while they are receiving an active payroll as the benefit terminates upon return to work. See 40 ILCS 5/14-124.

Ms. Burress is requesting a written appeal to waive her overpayment, stating that her doctor wrote her return-to-work date as June 23, 2025, and it isn't her fault she was paid the additional days.

Following a brief discussion of the information provided, Chairperson Becker moved to

deny Ms. Burress' request. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairperson Black and passed unanimously.

Sarah Guijon – Appeal Denial of Nonoccupational Disability Benefits

Ms. Guijon works as an Executive I for the Illinois Department of Human Services. She last worked June 4, 2025 and began a medical leave of absence on June 24, 2025 due to multiple disabling conditions.

Ms. Guijon submitted records, and her case was sent to the medical consultants at MMRO for review. The consultant determined there was insufficient evidence to support that she is mentally or physically incapacitated from performing her job duties as an Executive I.

Ms. Guijon is appealing against the denial of her claim. She states she was unclear what was required of her, although additional information had been requested. She asked for a copy of the MMRO report, and this was provided to her.

Ms. Guijon states she cannot possibly work at this time due to her disabling conditions. She is requesting a written appeal. She states in her last email that additional records have been sent, but nothing has been received at this time.

Samantha Goetz, SERS' general counsel, informed the Committee that SERS had received additional documentation from Ms. Guijon, which has been sent to MMRO for review. The Committee deferred a decision on Ms. Guijon's appeal pending the results of the MMRO review.

Jeannette Chu – Request to Reappeal Overpayment of Nonoccupational Disability Benefits

Jeannette Chu has worked for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs since June 2019. She went on a nonoccupational disability benefit on August 20, 2021. At that time her half-time ceasing date was calculated to be October 31, 2022.

Ms. Chu was requested by mail to submit additional medical records so SERS could see how her treatment was going and how she responded. Ms. Chu failed to submit the required medical evidence, and her benefits were suspended on June 7, 2022.

Ms. Chu eventually submitted the required medical evidence and her benefit was reinstated. The benefit calculation sheet had the correct half-time ceasing date of October 31, 2022. However, the system did not hold this date in the Prod Apps "BI" screen, so her benefit did not stop on October 31, 2022.

In June 2025, SERS received a copy of Ms. Chu's Notice of Award from the Social Security Administration. She was entitled to SSA disability benefits as of June 1, 2022. It was during the calculation of this overpayment that it was discovered that Ms. Chu's benefit should have stopped in 2022.

The calculation of her SSA benefit from June 2022 through October 2022 resulted in an overpayment of SERS benefits. Ms. Chu is aware of this overpayment and is willing to pay this amount to SERS with her backpay check from SSA.

Ms. Chu was mistakenly paid SERS benefits from November 1, 2022, through May 2025 resulting in an overpayment of benefits.

Ms. Chu is appealing this overpayment of her disability benefits. She disagrees that she ever failed to cooperate with SERS. She did cooperate with Midwest and agreed to repay this overpayment. She disagrees with paying the overpayment of SERS benefits as this was not her fault. She states she has no way to pay this amount back to SERS. Ms. Chu is requesting a written appeal. She would like SERS to receive her repayment of \$11,085.00 for the SSA overpayment and would like the overpayment of benefits waived.

The Committee voted to unanimously deny Ms. Chu's appeal at their September 2025 meeting. After determining that Ms. Chu did not provide sufficient additional documentation to substantiate her claim, no member moved to allow her a reappeal.

Deja Sawyer – Request to Reappeal Denial of Nonoccupational Disability Benefits

Ms. Sawyer works for the Illinois Department of Human Services as a Human Services Caseworker. She states her disability began on August 22, 2023, but she stopped working on January 14, 2025. She stated she would be returning to work on June 15, 2025.

Ms. Sawyer's file was sent to MMRO to be reviewed by SERS medical consultants. The reviewer stated, "with a reasonable degree of medical certainty, as based on the available medical evidence reviewed, the member is considered mentally and physically capable of performing their duties as a Human Service Caseworker." It was noted that her treatment has not included typical protocol for her alleged disability.

The Committee unanimously denied Ms. Sawyer's appeal at their May 2025 meeting. Ms. Sawyer is requesting a reappeal of the denial of disability benefits and provided additional medical records.

After reviewing the documentation provided and determining it was not sufficient to support Ms. Sawyer's claim, no member moved to allow a reappeal.

There being no further business to be brought before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled for November 13, 2025, in the System's Springfield office.

Marvin Becker, Chairperson

Arnold Black, Vice-Chairperson

Timothy Blair, Executive Secretary