

On Monday, March 3, the Washington State Senate passed a bill to provide an ongoing COLA to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. [Substitute Senate Bill 5085](#) would give TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees the same annual COLA that retirees in TRS/PERS/SERS/PSERS plans 2 and 3 receive. This is the first time since the legislature repealed the Uniform COLA in 2011 that an ongoing COLA proposal has passed a legislative chamber.

The bill is sponsored by the Senate's chief budget writer, Senate Ways & Means Committee Chair June Robinson (D, Everett). In addition to providing an ongoing COLA to TRS 1 and PERS 1 members, it also provides substantial budget relief. It would save the state \$600 million and local governments \$475 million over the next four years by merging TRS 1 and PERS 1, which are both underfunded, with Law Enforcement Officers and Firefighters (LEOFF) Plan 1, which is overfunded by almost \$3 billion.

Although the bill does not jeopardize or reduce police or firefighter pensions, groups that represent LEOFF members oppose it. Two years ago, part of the LEOFF surplus was used to give LEOFF members generous retirement bonuses. LEOFF members already have the most generous pensions offered to public employees in Washington.

In a lively debate on the Senate floor, Senator Robinson, Senator Yasmin Trudeau (D, Tacoma), and Senate Majority Leader Jamie Pedersen (D, Seattle) all spoke in favor of the bill. Senator Mark Schoesler (R, Ritzville) and Senate Republican Leader John Braun (Lewis County) spoke against it. [Click here](#) to watch the debate.

The bill passed by a vote of 28 to 21. All but two Democrats voted for the bill. Senator Marko Liias (D, Edmonds) and Senator John Lovick (D, Mill Creek) joined every Senate Republican in voting no. Here is the complete roll call:

Yeas: 28 Nays: 21 Absent: 0 Excused: 0

Voting Yea: Senators [Alvarado](#) (D-34), [Bateman](#) (D-22), [Chapman](#) (D-24), [Cleveland](#) (D-49), [Conway](#) (D-29), [Cortes](#) (D-18), [Dhingra](#) (D-45), [Frame](#) (D-36), [Hansen](#) (D-23), [Hasegawa](#) (D-11), [Kauffman](#) (D-47), [Krishnadasan](#) (D-26), [Lovelett](#) (D-40), [Nobles](#) (D-28), [Orwall](#) (D-33), [Pedersen](#) (D-43), [Ramos](#) (D-5), [Riccelli](#) (D-3), [Robinson](#) (D-38), [Saldaña](#) (D-37), [Salomon](#) (D-32), [Shewmake](#) (D-42), [Slatter](#) (D-48), [Stanford](#) (D-1), [Trudeau](#) (D-27), [Valdez](#) (D-46), [Wellman](#) (D-41), [Wilson, C.](#) (D-30)

Voting Nay: Senators [Boehnke](#) (R-8), [Braun](#) (R-20), [Christian](#) (R-4), [Dozier](#) (R-16), [Fortunato](#) (R-31), [Gildon](#) (R-25), [Goehner](#) (R-12), [Harris](#) (R-17), [Holy](#) (R-6), [King](#) (R-14), [Liias](#) (D-21), [Lovick](#) (D-44), [MacEwen](#) (R-35), [McCune](#) (R-2), [Muzzall](#) (R-10), [Schoesler](#) (R-9), [Short](#) (R-7), [Torres](#) (R-15), [Wagoner](#) (R-39), [Warnick](#) (R-13), [Wilson, J.](#) (R-19)

The bill now heads to the House, where it is expected to face significant opposition. House leadership appears to have other plans for the LEOFF 1 surplus that do not include providing an ongoing COLA to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. WSSRA members must work harder than ever to convince the House to adopt the Senate's proposal.