



RELAC newsletter

Your Pension and Health Care Watchdog

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President's Message

by Linda C. Hopkins

Happy New Year!

It is my pleasure to serve as president of the finest retiree organization for 2025. Our theme for the year is: "Innovate. Engage. Empower: Charting a New Course for the Future." I look forward to growing our innovative programs and initiatives that will continue to enhance your membership experience.

We ended 2024 by implementing an online registration system for the annual Holiday Luncheon and Toy Drive that was held in December at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Whittier. Members welcomed the efficient and fast sign-up program.

We also launched the Veterans Opportunity Drawing in November 2024 to recognize and honor RELAC members who served in a branch of the U.S. military (Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard). Each of the five veterans selected received a \$50 gift card. I hope you will take the time to read their profiles on page 5. I loved this outreach.

In addition, the filing period is open for RELAC's scholarship program, which awards five, \$1,000 scholarships annually. Members and immediate family members who are planning to attend an eligible educational institution may apply.

We are excited about the new and improved electronic filing system that has been rolled out for the scholarship program. Detailed information is available at the website, www.relac.org.

A new communication tool has been added to the website; asklinda@relac.org is available to members to send in their questions.

Please remember to check out our new benefits program at www.benefitsdetails.com/RELAC

Our advocacy on your behalf will not diminish. We take seriously our mission to protect your hard-earned pension and healthcare benefits. RELAC's representatives on LACERA's Board of Retirement and Board of Investments serve as our watchdogs on these important entities. They attend meetings, actively support items that benefit RELAC, and keep us informed via columns published in this newsletter.

You will hear about other innovative activities to keep us engaged as we move through the year. Until next time, take care and be well!



RELAC Volunteer Loretta Lopez arranges the display of donated toys.

RELAC Members Celebrate Holidays; Donate Barrels of Toys for Needy Families

by Victoria Pipkin Lane, Editor

"Families are struggling so continue to give monetarily and of your time," said Khoi Dao, Acting Assistant Fire Chief, Los Angeles County Fire Department, in remarks to RELAC members at the General Membership Meeting and annual Holiday Luncheon and Toy Drive held December 5, 2024.

More than 160 RELAC members, who attended the kickoff to the holiday season, filled three bins with new, unwrapped toys that will be donated to low-income families and children. "These donations send a message of goodwill to those in need, and show a genuine concern for fellow human beings," said Assistant Chief Dao.

RELAC's toy drive is an annual partnership with the Los Angeles County Fire Department's Spark of Love campaign. La Fonda Riggins and Esther Marquez of

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L.A. County Increases Lifetime Maximum Benefit (LMB) for Anthem & Prudent Buyer Plans

by Debbie Martin, RELAC Executive Director, Trustee, LACERA Board of Investments

There is good news retirees!

Los Angeles County has approved an increase to \$1.5 million in the lifetime maximum benefit (LMB) for retirees with Anthem Blue cross I, II, and Prudent Buyer.

The decision was praised by the RELAC Board of Directors. While applicable only to Indemnity/PPO plans, the increase extends the viability of these options for managing significant health expenses over the longer term.

The increase becomes effective July 1, 2025.

Retirees may review or reconsider healthcare options, including plan types, benefits and the carriers by visiting LACERA's Healthcare Plans page, <https://www.lacera.com>.



Continued on p.5

Board of Retirement

by Les Robbins, RELAC Director
Trustee, LACERA Board of Retirement



So, I will start my column with some very good news with respect to the issue of the \$1 million lifetime cap on the Anthem Blue Cross Plans, I, II, and Prudent Buyer.

The County has agreed to INCREASE the cap to \$1.5 million from the current \$1 million dollar cap. This is expected to take effect in July of 2025. They have also agreed to let LACERA crunch the numbers on the impact in enrollments that this may have on the ABC Plans. We expect to be able to crunch numbers for the first year of the cap increase just to see what the impact will be on the Anthem Plans, primarily ABC II.

LACERA CEO Santos Kreimann has had this issue on his radar screen since he was first hired, and it looks like finally some significant progress has been made. The COLA numbers for October just came in, and the CPI for the month of October did not increase. The year-to-date INCREASE is 3.3% so it still looks like our COLA next April will max out at either 2% or 3% depending upon which plan you are in.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on November 8, 2024 released the 2025 premiums, deductibles, and co-insurance amounts for the Medicare Part A and Part B programs as well as the Medicare Part D income-related monthly adjustment amounts. The Medicare Part B is that part of Medicare that covers physicians' services, outpatient hospital services, certain home health services, durable medical equipment, and certain other medical and health services not covered by Medicare Part A.

Each year the Part B premium, deductible and coinsurance rates are determined according to provisions of the Social Security Act. The new standard monthly premiums for Medicare Part B enrollees will be \$185 for 2025, an increase of \$10.30 from the current \$174.70. If you are enrolled in one of the LACERA Medicare Plans, Kaiser Senior Advantage and ABC III you will get, once the Board of Supervisors approves, the reimbursement for the new premium amount of \$185. Remember, the Part B Premiums are means tested meaning that they are based on your Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI). If you go to www.lacera.org website you can find out, based on your MAGI what your Part B premiums will be.

At the monthly Board of Retirement meetings, LACERA staff provides us with information I find interesting on pensions in the U.S. The U.S. is falling behind many other developed countries around the globe when it comes to retirement benefits and systems. The Mercer CFA Institute Global Pension Index only gives the U.S. a C+ grade. This places the U.S. 29th out of the top 48 globally, due primarily to low access to workplace retirement plans, and no easy process for savings to be "leaked" from retirement accounts before retirement.

Some of the nations that received A grades were The Netherlands, Iceland, Denmark and Israel. B+ grades included Singapore, Australia, Finland, and Norway. B grades included Chile, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Uruguay, New Zealand, Belgium, MEXICO, Canada, Ireland, France, Germany, Croatia and Portugal.

News From LACERA

by JJ Popowich
Assistant Executive Officer



Now that we are on the other side of the holiday season, I sincerely hope all of you had a wonderful and happy season of joy with family and friends.

Work continues at LACERA on rolling out the alternative payment solution for members who are unbanked and receiving payments by check. We have finalized configuration, rules and options that needed to be defined so that the vendor, Conduent, and banking partner, Comerica, can set up the overall pre-paid card framework. We are working to finalize the design of the pre-paid debit card.

We are reviewing various brochures, disclosures, and materials that we may use to roll out the program and inform members on how the payment option works. Our goal is to make the program user friendly with all the functionality expected of a bank account. Stay tuned for further details on the launch date.

I may have mentioned that part of the Superior Member Experience strategic priority was to create a Member Experience Council (MXC). The MXC consists of representatives of every division in LACERA that interacts with members or provides services to those divisions that interact with members. The MXC's primary purpose is to ensure that we are fulfilling our commitment to create a Superior Member Experience by: identifying and understanding the various journeys a member experiences throughout their life with LACERA, measuring our success in meeting member expectations during those journeys, continually innovating better ways to deliver service, delivering a true omni-channel service delivery method, and coordinating efforts internally to ensure the superior member experience.

What's a journey? It's a specific event triggered process that a member experiences. For example, a member starts their life with LACERA as they go through a new hire journey. They may then enter into a previous service purchase journey, and later a taking the steps to retire journey which leads into the ready to retire journey. Journeys are how we can identify and take a deep look at what works and doesn't work for members.

The MXC has already identified several journeys that members take throughout their life with LACERA. The team is now working on mapping each journey so that we have a full understanding of what members experience and how we process and respond to member requests. We have already identified over 20 specific member journeys. The MXC will begin mapping each of these journeys and then examining all aspects of those journeys to understand what works and doesn't work and then propose improvements or changes. Surveys and focus groups will be conducted as part of this process. The first journey researched will be the New Hire experience.

Another part of our Superior Member Experience priority is to improve and enhance the retiree healthcare experience. Similar to the MXC, the team working on this initiative is busy identifying all of the journeys a member takes as they retire, enroll, and access the various benefits of our retiree healthcare plans. The team is currently focused on creating more informative materials that will allow members, who are in the process of retiring, to better understand healthcare plan options.

As you prepare to file your income taxes, remember that LACERA will issue the 1099-R to all members by January 31, and will post the 1099-R in members' document library accessible on MY LACERA, which is the easiest and quickest way to get a copy of the document.

Thank you for your contributions to Los Angeles County and its citizens. Take care of yourself and be sure to enjoy every moment of your retirement – you've earned it!

Board of Retirement Continued

Food for thought – In my opinion corporate CEOs in the U.S. make far more money than they do in most of these other countries, and the latter does a much better job of providing retirement benefits for the working class.

Finally, one last thing before I sign off. Late last year, there was some significant progress with the Windfall Elimination Provision and Pension Offset issues in the Congress. However, at presstime it was not known whether the legislation made it out of the Congress and on to the President's desk for signature. I will provide an update in my next column.

Holiday Celebration cont. from p.1

the County Fire Department joined Chief Dao at the holiday luncheon.

Linda C. Hopkins, RELAC President, announced the theme for 2025, "Innovate, Engage, Empower: Charting a New Course for the Future." She challenged RELAC members to "do more," and promoted the new communication tool, "asklinda@relac.org," for them to share their suggestions and concerns.

The former RELAC Vice President commended members for their generosity in supporting the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and the March of Dimes. "More than 25 percent of people in Southern California experience food insecurity," she told the audience.

"It is heartwarming to me that RELAC members stepped up and donated more than \$10,700 last year to help homeless families and children," she said. "I was proud to represent you in December at the Food Bank's annual Season of Giving Luncheon," she added. The 2025 donations collected so far are \$465, which includes a \$25 online contribution.

Success also was reached with the March of Dimes campaign. "In 2023, we surpassed our \$5,000 goal," said Hopkins. These funds are used to support vital programs aimed at reducing premature births and providing prenatal care to expectant mothers.

Hopkins updated members on the Veterans Opportunity Drawing, held in November 2024. "We cannot repay our veterans for their service and dedication, but I am delighted that we had five winners in the special drawing," she said. (Profiles of the winners appear in this newsletter.)

Tamra Smalewitz of Southland Credit Union spoke about the various programs offered specifically for senior citizens, including a \$25 bonus for new accounts.

Outgoing President Brian Berger welcomed RELAC members and introduced the Board of Directors in attendance, including Bobbie Fesler, Secretary, Dyanne Nelson, Treasurer, Dave Muir, Past President, Diane Sandoval, Nora Jackson, Victoria Pipkin-Lane and J.P. Harris, who led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Entertainment was provided by Bobby Zarate. Several RELAC members were happy to win opportunity drawings with prizes of gift cards to various retail establishments and See's Candies. A continental breakfast and deli-style, buffet luncheon were served.

The exact date and location of the next RELAC General Membership meeting is under discussion. Updates will be provided via e-mail and on the website, www.relac.org.



RELAC staff enjoying the luncheon, from left, Brenda Stephens, Margaret Bell, John Allison, Mary Ramirez, and Toni Simmons.



Armando Garcia, who retired from the Department of Human Resources, catches up with former colleagues.



RELAC members reconnect at the holiday luncheon.



RELAC Veterans and those who are 90+ years young are recognized at the general membership meeting and holiday luncheon.



Musician Bobby Zarate performs.



Acting Assistant Fire Chief Dao thanks RELAC members for the donated toys.



RELAC Past President Dave Muir and Acting Assistant Fire Chief Dao present gift card to opportunity drawing winner.



RELAC members help themselves to a delicious buffet lunch.



Mary Ramirez and Darrell B. Mah visit Havana, Cuba.



Keeping Up with Retirees

by Mary Ramirez, RELAC Member

(Editor's Note: We frequently ask RELAC members what they have been up to in retirement. Below are responses from Mary Ramirez, who retired with 34 years of service on April 9, 2020 from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. She also worked for the Office of Public Safety, and the Departments of Public Health and Health Services. She resides in Rancho Cucamonga, California.)

Did you plan your retirement?

When I started my County career, which was right after high school, I had planned to retire at the age of 55. Due to unforeseen circumstances, I retired at the age of 52. I was truly blessed to have the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and LACERA assist me with the early retirement process.

Did you have a bucket list, and if so, how much has been fulfilled so far?

I always plan ahead, so when it came to retirement, you bet I had a bucket list ready to go! Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic put a hold on my retirement celebration and travel plans. As soon as the travel alerts were lifted, I packed my bags and began to explore the world!

My first stop was Disney World in Orlando, Florida! Yes, it really is for me the happiest place on Earth! Then there were a few domestic trips to explore a few states here at home before traveling to Mexico, Canada, Germany, Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, and Spain.

I love the beach, so I also have enjoyed the warm waters of Nassau, Dominican Republic, Virgin Islands, St. Marteen, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Thomas, Martinique, and Barbados.

What else have you been up to in retirement?

I have traveled quite a bit. I love exploring other countries, cultures, cuisines, desserts, coffees, and local spirits. My pending trips will take me to the United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, and back to Spain.

Prior to retiring, I made my health a top priority. Therefore, staying fit and eating healthy has made my traveling and active lifestyle a breeze!

There was a time when I contemplated taking a few college courses or going back to work. After weighing the pros and cons, I decided to go back to work part time. It was the BEST decision I could have made for myself! I am currently working for RELAC as an administrative assistant, assisting County retirees with their membership and supplemental benefit needs.

Which programs/achievements of your County career are you most proud of?

Back in 1999, I was a member of the consolidation team that assisted the Board of Supervisors and Chief Executive Office with the consolidation of the Office of Public Safety (OPS) with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. This process took a couple of years under the direction of retired Los Angeles Police Department executives.

I had the opportunity to work with three management teams (OPS, LASD, and LAPD) in making this a successful transition. Due to my input and efforts during this process, I received the LASD Meritorious Award. For me, the greatest achievement during my County career was earning an educational degree and administrative certifications, which prepared me to promote to Executive Secretary III.

Tips on Traveling Light & Stress-Free

by Ana Gaona, RELAC Member

When I retired from the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, I traded hospital halls for airport terminals and suitcases. In the past two years, I have traveled to more than 24 countries, and in the process have immersed myself in the world of travel.

During these journeys, I have discovered the beauty of new places and the art of packing smart. No more suitcases that could double as gym weights.

Now, I utilize a strategy that focuses on travelling light, stress-free and stylishly prepared for any destination. Here are three smart tips for the journey.

1. Versatile Capsule Wardrobe – You really don't need 10 outfits for a seven-day trip. Pack solid-colored tops, comfy jeans and a black dress that works for day or night. Lightweight sweaters are perfect for cooler evenings.
2. Must-Have Travel Essentials – Never leave home without packing cubes to keep the suitcase organized, a travel laundry kit for longer trips, reusable water bottle, and a power pack with chargers.
3. Avoid Overpacking – Here's a new golden rule. If it's "just in case" packing leave it behind. Stick to a color palette, lay out everything you think you need then remove at least 30%, and include multipurpose items such as sarong, scarf or walking shoes.

Remember, the less you carry, the more room you have for new experiences, souvenirs and memories.

(Editor's Note: Gaona is co-owner of Two Peacocks Travel. For more information, she may be reached at ana@twopeacockstravel.com.)



Ramirez is awed by the architecture in Barcelona, Spain.



RELAC Recognizes Veterans - Winners of 1st Annual Opportunity Drawing

Sylvia Mercado

A four-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force, Mercado was assigned to the Basic Training and Technical School, and Communications, where she spent two and a half years in Germany. She was assigned to the National Security Agency in Maryland, and later deployed to a communications team on a ship that traveled from Japan to Hawaii. Mercado was a member of the Air Force Volleyball Team, and competed in U.S. Navy golf tournaments that took her to Belgium. She values the experience gained in the Air Force. Her military honors include an Air Force Training Ribbon, Air Force Overseas Ribbon, Air Force Good Conduct Medal, and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award. Mercado concluded her military career with an Honorable Discharge.



Sylvia Mercado

Jan Musial

Musial was 17 years young when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he served for six years, including pre-service and as a reservist. Musial's military career during the Cold War covered the Pacific Fleet, which took him through Panama, the Aleutian Islands, Russia, and Serbia. A Yeoman for the majority of his military service, he was assigned to the Everette F. Larson Destroyer. As an administrative specialist, he performed a variety of clerical and administrative duties for personnel assigned to the destroyer. He earned an Honorable Discharge. Musial said, the Navy was "truly an eye-opening experience, and yet the best thing that I could have done" for myself and family. "The military experience disciplined me, turned me into a responsible man, taught me how to become a team player, and shaped me into the man I am today," he added.

Jan Musial



Ricky Taira

Taira served four years in the U.S. Army as a military intelligence coordinator, and before receiving an Honorable Discharge completed his last assignment overseas in Japan. He said the Army was "a positive experience, and gave me the opportunity to travel to Japan and learn about the Japanese culture." Taira also explored Korea, Philippines, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and Thailand during his time in the Army. "My most memorable experience was climbing Mt. Fuji, an inactive volcano," he said. Taira received several awards, including an Army Commendation Letter and Medal, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Marksman, and a Meritorious Unit Citation.



Willie Wade

Ricky Taira



Willie Wade

Wade was a Private First Class in the U.S. Army, where he attended the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was trained on the use of fire support systems in combat. Unfortunately, he was injured during a training exercise, and retired with an Honorable Discharge. He received several military awards, including Honorable Mentions for the National Defense Service Medal and an Expert Rifle Badge.

Howard N. Wald

Wald served four years in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, and was assigned to the USS Shields Destroyer Fire Control. He was part of the team that tracked and engaged enemy threats and took part in antisubmarine warfare exercises off the coast of Japan and Okinawa. Wald said he loved the experience, but not the war. Although recommended for reenlistment, he accepted an Honorable Discharge. Following his military career, he and a friend purchased a small hotel in Tahiti where he spent a few years, but eventually sold the hotel and moved back to the U.S. Soon after, he joined the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, serving for 25 years and retiring as a lieutenant.



Howard N. Wald

County Increases LMB, cont. from p.1

LACERA and the County have stated that regular reviews of the health plans will be conducted to obtain information on customers' experience. 'This ongoing evaluation will allow LACERA to make adjustments to the LMB with the final goal of eliminating the cap altogether,' said officials.

WEP/GPO Update

In other retiree news, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act, which would repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO). The WEP reduces the Social Security benefit for workers who receive a government pension from employment, and the GPO reduces the benefit for spouses and survivors.

There was no report on action taken by the U.S. Senate at the publishing deadline. If H.R. 82 is not passed, new legislation will be required in the 2025 Congressional session.

In California, as of December, 2017, there were more than 249,000 beneficiaries penalized by the WEP, and almost 99,000 negatively impacted by the GPO.

RELAC's Board of Directors encourages members to write to their representatives in Congress urging them to support legislation that stops the unfair reductions in Social Security benefits.

To find your member of Congress, visit www.house.gov/representatives, and www.senate.gov/senators.



Inside LA County

by Judy Hammond
RELAC Member

It certainly was not a “ho-hum” election in November as it pertained to the County. Voters approved restructuring County government by adding four new supervisors and an elected executive officer, imposed a permanent and increased sales tax for homeless services, ousted the district attorney and replaced him with a former prosecutor who says he will reverse

his predecessor’s progressive “soft on crime” policies, hiked the property tax rate for fire services, and implemented fees in several areas to support maintenance of open space and wildlife corridors.

The vote to change the structure of County government was far from an overwhelming mandate – 1,665,735 for and 1,561,068 against. The plan calls for the drawing of the boundaries of the nine supervisorial districts following the 2030 census, with the election of seven supervisors in 2032 and four in 2034. (Two of the supervisors elected in 2032 will have only two-year terms, requiring them to run again in 2034.) The executive officer position is to be established by 2028.

Other provisions included in the charter measure include: Require by 2026 all items of business of the Board be on the posted agenda at least 120 hours before a regular meeting; • By 2026, establish an independent Los Angeles County Ethics Commission, an Office of Ethics Compliance and the position of ethics compliance officer; • By 2028, establish director of budget and management, and County legislative analyst positions; • Authorize the suspension, with or without pay, of an elective County officer who has been criminally charged with a felony related to a violation of official duties; • Prohibit former County officials for a minimum of two years after leaving County service from lobbying the County. There are lots of things to work out to implement the charter amendment, and the Board of Supervisors has begun the process by appointing a task force to work out the initial details.

The County is moving forward on closing the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration and relocating the headquarters to a downtown skyscraper, and Supervisor Janice Hahn – the only supervisor to vote against the plan – is none too happy about it. After the Board voted to spend \$205 million to buy the building, Hahn criticized not only the idea, but also the manner in which it was approved. It was, she said, “the most closed-door, off-the-record plan to come into fruition that I have witnessed in all my years as an elected official.” The public was not even made aware of the proposal, she said, until a month before it came to a vote. Relocating the seat of government has been discussed for years due to the seismic risk of the Hall of Admin, but it looked like the building would survive when the supervisors put aside \$66 million to retrofit and upgrade the building and administrators presented a plan on how it would be done. That money will now be used to buy the new building. “I went by the proposed building the other day and I felt nothing,” said Hahn. “It is a soul-less building in the middle of a bunch of tall buildings. That isn’t what County Government should look like. I don’t think we need to be in a skyscraper, we need to be near the people.”

Having a new headquarters might logistically make it easier to house the four new supervisors, their staff and elected executive officer approved by voters in the November election. The eighth floor of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration now houses the current five supervisors and there is room for no more. The chief executive officer (CEO) and staff take up the seventh floor. From a protocol stance, you might think the CEO would have to be bumped to a different floor to make room for the new supervisors. And then, the CEO would have to bump other departments to house his/her staff. And how would you seat all nine supervisors and their staffs in the Board of Supervisors hearing room? Not to say these logistics couldn’t be figured out, but the new structure approved by voters brings logistical issues that could be a nightmare. Some proponents of the measure to add the four new supervisors say the current supervisors’ staffs could be cut, but that may not be realistic as each supervisor will still need aides to advise on specific issues, like health, law enforcement, zoning and public works projects.

Supervisors are looking at creating a new department to handle homeless issues now that voters approved a permanent sales tax for homeless services that is estimated to bring in \$1.1 billion NY. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) oversees homeless issues now, but most of the supervisors are unhappy with the agency’s performance.

An outside audit, ordered in 2021 after former Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas was convicted of fraud in the awarding of a County contract, detected no pattern of corruption and fraud during Ridley-Thomas’ 12-year tenure, but found many problems with the contracting process. The findings: problem contractors are rarely suspended,

employees discuss county business on their personal phones, contracts are sometimes awarded directly to a vendor and not put out to bid without a clear explanation why, and often the County does a poor job of vetting vendors. Interestingly, the full report was not disclosed nor the amount paid to Covington & Burling and FTI Consulting to do the three-year audit. The County said the information was confidential under attorney-client privilege.

The Public Defender’s Office, District Attorney’s Office, Probation Department, Superior Court, and Los Angeles Community College District have launched a program to give justice-involved youth between ages of 16-18 the opportunity to earn a college certificate or degree instead of facing a criminal record.

A new \$75 million wing of the Natural History Museum – called the Commons -- features two permanent exhibits: a 75-foot sauropod dinosaur skeleton named Gnatalie and a 1981 mural L.A. History: a Mexican Perspective. There is no cost to explore the new entrance, which has a 400-seat theater, museum shop and grab-and-go café.

The County is issuing permits to allow the sale of food prepared in home kitchens, saying the program benefits single moms who care for children and elderly parents and can’t leave the home for work, as well as providing a second source of income for immigrant families on a tight budget.

The County Museum of Art, which recently reached \$793 million in fundraising for its new 110,000-square-foot David Geffen Galleries, expects to open the facility in April 2026.

RELAC Donations Exceed \$10,000

Last year, RELAC members donated more than \$10,000 to the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, bringing the total amount of contributions in the past five years in excess of \$70,000.

President Linda C. Hopkins represented RELAC at the Food Bank’s recent, annual Season of Sharing Luncheon. The event “honors those who have gone above and beyond to fight hunger in our community,” said Michael Flood, President and CEO.

Michelle Fisher, ABC 7 News Anchor, served as emcee for the luncheon, held at the Omni Hotel at California Plaza.



RELAC President Linda C. Hopkins meets ABC 7 News Anchor Michelle Fisher, who served as emcee for L.A. Regional Food Bank’s annual Season for Sharing Luncheon.



Darrell Mah and Mary Ramirez check out Alaska.

Cite a few challenges you encountered and how you overcame them?

I worked for four different departments during my County career. One recurring challenge was learning each department's policy and procedures, as well as internal correspondence formats. I overcame the challenge by asking the executive secretaries for assistance. They were more than willing to train me.

One of my biggest challenges was working with the executive command staff of LASD. Although many had great ideas, they oftentimes were frustrated when informed they had to follow internal procedures for submitting projects. When internal editing reviews were bypassed, the projects were incomplete when they reached the approval stage, and were returned to the project leads. To overcome this outcome, I developed a team-focused working environment and utilized colored-coded folders to expedite the review process.

Finally, what would you say to your younger self just beginning a career in County government?

My message would be something like this: "Mary, this is not a part-time job. You are going to be in this line of work for the next 34 years. So, PLEASE start now contributing to the 401-K and 457 Horizons Plans as soon as you are eligible. Also, make sure to take advantage of the County's match on both plans! As you promote, add your increases to the total percentage being withheld.



Mah and Ramirez take in Hawaii.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

October 2024 - November 2024

October 2024

- Chief Executive Office – Jill Lu
- Fire – **Kevin Klar**, Daniel Murchison, William Pryor
- Health Services – Mary Logan, Rudy Tarango
- Mental Health – Angel (Millicent) Baker
- Public Social Services – Linda Giles
- Public Works – Robert Crawford
- Registrar-Recorder- Joyce Morris
- Associate Member – Cecelia Tarango

November 2024

- Child Support Services – Candice Harrington
- Treasurer & Tax Collector - Maria Guerrero
- Associate Member – Richard Guerrero
- Unknown Department – Delana Trotter

Thanks for Referrals

Our thanks to those members, shown in bold, for referring new members, shown in italics, in September, October and November, 2024.

- George Hernandez** – Rudy Tarango, Health Services
- Gladys Hidayat** – Linda Reusser, Children & Family Services
- Ken Mort** – Robert Maybury, Sheriff
- William Pryor** – Kevin Klar, Fire
- Olga Quintero** – Candice Harrington, Child Support Services
- Ida Ramos**, Barbara Knighton – Pamela Manning, Public Works
- Yvonne Rodriguez** – Mary Logan, Health Services
- Barbara Sanchez** – Maria Guerrero, Treasurer & Tax Collector
- Denise Scales** – Angel (Millicent) Baker, Mental Health
- Richard Sottile** – Mark Carlson, Internal Services
- Beverly Williams** – Sharon Langley, Children & Family Services

(Editor's Note: Due to RELAC's aging membership, we must remain vigilant in signing up new members. We are the only organization dedicated to protecting hard-earned pension and healthcare benefits. For membership applications, call the RELAC office (800) 537-3522, e-mail admin@relac.org, or visit the website, www.relac.org.)



Happy Birthday, RELAC Centenarians

January

- Gloria F. Manly**, 102, Health Services
- Dorothy G. Mc Intyre**, 100, Parks & Recreation
- Gilda Saporito**, 105, Health Services

February

- Frederick Paul Horn**, 101, District Attorney
- Hanako Nakamoto**, 101, (no department listed)
- Cleo B. Webb**, 101, Building Services
- Connette White**, 102, District Attorney



Fire Chief Marrone and Jones

Retired Assistant Fire Chief Scott Jones Honored

He was only 16 years young when a career in the fire service began at the La Habra Heights Fire Department. Scott Jones became a fulltime firefighter with the Buena Park Fire Department, and then in 1974 joined the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD), where he served for 31 years.

In November, LACoFD Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone, Orange County Fire Chief Brian Fennesy and La Habra Heights Fire Chief Edward Martin joined firefighters, Jones and his family for a ceremony honoring his 63 years of outstanding contributions to the fire service.

Jones was assistant fire chief in charge of the department's Air and Wildland Division when he retired in 2005. He returned to LACoFD in 2006 to train firefighters and supervisors in wildland fire operations and procedures, including fire aviation.

He also coordinated the Quick Reaction Force Helicopter program for the Orange County Fire Authority. It is a "first of its kind" standing task force of four helicopters that are available for six months, 24 hours daily, to aggressively attack wildland fires.

"Jones has left an indelible impact on the fire service for his role in advancing wildfire training and safety standards for local, regional, national and international wildland firefighters," said LACoFD officials. "His legacy is one of professional excellence, and of a servant leader who always placed the well-being of his team and community before himself," according to the statement.



Retired DHS Managers in Action

By Barry Hunt, RELAC Member

(Editors Note: Many RELAC members are retirees from the Departments of Health Services, Public Health and Mental Health. This update contains information on recent activities.)

Retirement gives us more time to enjoy our favorite things, like reminiscing with friends and celebrating memorable events. Retired DHS Managers participated in many activities last year.

On December 3, 2024, we gathered at the San Antonio Winery for a fun-filled luncheon.



Retired DHS managers gathered at the San Antonio Winery.

The RELAC General Membership Meeting and Holiday Toy Drive was really enjoyable. Former President Brian Berger and staff updated the attendees on progress made in 2024 progress, and the plans for 2025.

We shared a nice breakfast, lunch, music and camaraderie with County retiree friends from over the decades. Members brought scores of gifts for the Spark of Love Toy Drive. (Details appear in other parts of this newsletter.) I hope to see you there next year!



Barry Hunt, center, congratulates some of the graduate students.

Zoom sessions were conducted with Cal State L.A. graduate students, faculty and guest speakers from the healthcare industry. The 30 students did well on the final exam in December my Managerial Leadership course.

We also watched the 65th Annual L.A. County Holiday Celebration on the Plaza of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on Christmas Eve. The performances by 25 multi-ethnic vocal, instrumental, theatrical and dance groups were spectacular.

In the last 2024 session of our nationwide virtual French conversation class, we sang a classic from 1939 with the late Lucienne Delyle ("Valser dans l'Ombre" is "Auld Lang Syne"). Contact me to join us in 2025.

RELAC NEWSLETTER

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Number 1

Retired Employees
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Office Hours

9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Monday - Thursday

Closed Friday,

Saturday, Sunday &

Public Holidays

PASSAGES

Compiled by Judy Hammond,
RELAC Member



Whitby



Honkawa



Daniels



Gonser



Aguilera

DEATHS: **Roger Whitby**, 85, an attorney in the County Counsel's Office for 32 years, retiring in 2002. Whitby – described by former County Counsel Ray Fortner as an outstanding family man and brilliant lawyer – commuted weekly between Los Angeles and Provo, Utah, where his wife and family lived, for more than 20 years and retired there. Former Principal Deputy County Counsel **Robbi Work**, who retired in 2016 after 31 years of County service, the first seven as a children's social worker in the Department of Children and Family Services; following a head injury sustained in a fall. Her father, Frank, was a 37-year County employee, last serving in the Department of Human Resources. **Yoshi Honkawa**, 100, a longtime health care executive and influential figure in health care policy and advocacy in both California and nationally, whose career began in 1964 in the finance department of the County-USC Medical Center, where he was comptroller, assistant administrator and associate administrator, later becoming director of fiscal and hospital program planning in the Department of Hospitals and an employee of the Department of Health Services, leaving in 1975. **Wilbur "Will" Snyder**, 97, who was a stationary operating engineer at the County's Central Heating and Refrigeration plant and Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Center, often tapped to train and mentor new employees and serving as shop steward and sergeant of arms on Local 501 executive board, retiring at age 63 with 16 years of service. Deputy **George Meza**, who joined the Sheriff's Department in 1994, assigned to the Industry Station at the time of his death on Dec. 1. **Carla Krueger**, wife of 54 years of retired Internal Services Department technology manager **John Krueger**, from complications of Parkinson's disease. **Kurt Freeman**, 86, who served as director of the County's Antelope Valley Rehabilitation Center. Longtime County reporter **Marc Haefele**, 82, who wrote for the L.A. Weekly, L.A. Times, City News Service, New York Times, KNX, KPCC, and KPFK, from cancer.

RETIREMENTS: **Sandra Cruz**, executive assistant to Supervisor Kathryn Barger, with more than 41 years of service.

APPOINTMENTS: **Paula Daniels**, who founded the L.A. Food Policy Council and served as senior advisor on food policy to former L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, selected to head the County Office of Food Equity. **Matthew Gonser**, most recently chief resilience officer for the City and County of Honolulu and executive director for the Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency, named L.A. County's new climate resilience officer. **Gabriella Aguilera**, chief deputy administrator in the division adult parole for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, selected the County Probation Department's new deputy director of adult operations. **Sanford Rose**, who began his 31-year probation career in L.A. County as a reserve deputy probation officer and most recently a consultant, is the new deputy director of juvenile institutions and field services.

ELECTIONS: Former federal prosecutor and Assistant U.S. Attorney General **Nathan Hochman** handily defeated incumbent District Attorney **George Gascón**. Former District Attorney **Jackie Lacey**, a RELAC member, administered the oath of office to Supervisor **Kathryn Barger** for her third and last term. Barger will serve as chair of the Board in 2025. Supervisor **Hilda Solis** elected chair pro tem, meaning she will automatically become chair of the Board in December 2025. Deputy Public Defender **George Turner Jr.** defeated **Steve Napolitano**, former senior deputy to Supervisor Don Knabe, to become a Superior Court judge. Principal Deputy County Counsel **Aleen Lydia Langston**, 54, an attorney in the County Counsel's Office for 28 years, elected to represent active employees on the Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association (LACERA) Board of Investments and Board of Retirement, with both terms expiring Dec. 31, 2027. **Assessor Jeff Prang** elected 2025 president of the California Assessors Association, comprised of the state's 58 county assessors.

HONORS: **Megan Harabid**, manager of the Probation Department's policy unit, one of 30 honored by Business Life magazine as a "Women Achiever," recognized for her advocacy for victims' rights and volunteer efforts to expand the bone marrow donor list. **Sunitha Menon**, one of honorees on 30th annual Out100 list, cited for her contributions in the public sector as first executive director of the County's LGBTQ+ Commission. Dr. **Lawrence M. Opas**, who has served for more than 50 years in medical education at LA General Medical Center, the last 23 as designated institutional official, selected for the John C. Gienapp Distinguished Service Award – one of the highest honors in graduate medical education – by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. Dr. **Barry Jordan**, chief medical officer at Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Center, cited by Global Healthcare Magazine as one of the most innovative chief medical officers to watch in 2024. Jordan, who has for the past 20 years focused on sports neurology, is recognized for his groundbreaking work in athlete recovery and performance enhancement; his expertise is especially focused on traumatic brain injury and Alzheimer's disease. Supervisor **Kathryn Barger** presented the President's Award by the Peace Officers Association of Los Angeles County for her support of law enforcement and public safety.

COURTS: The state attorney general, who took over an investigation begun by the corruption unit of the Sheriff's Department two years ago when Alex Villaneuva was sheriff, has declined to file criminal charges against ex-Supervisor **Sheila Kuehl** and her long-time close friend **Patti Giggans**. The investigation centered on allegations that Kuehl, while a member of the Metro Board of Directors, helped steer a series of no-bid Metro contracts to Peace Over Violence, of which Giggans served as director. A lawsuit filed by former Sheriff **Alex Villaneuva** against the County for placing him on a "do not rehire" list was dismissed by a federal judge.



Rose



Hochman



Langston



Harabid



Menon



Haefele

IN MEMORIAM

This list includes retired employees, both RELAC members and non-members.

Agricultural Comm./Wts. & Meas. - Robert W. Orsburn
AIDS Program - Naomi R. Adamsworlund
Assessor - Flor Argueta, Renee L. Jackson, Peter C. Menotti, Karman So, Theresa M. Stevens
Auditor - Controller - Henry I. Watanabe
Chief Executive Office - Gwendolyn D. Dumas, Frederick W. Olson
Child Support Services - Alexander M. Carranza, Maria T. Contreras
Children & Family Services - Carol L. Hansen, Kevin B. Jones, Helena C. Leathers, Jennifer J. Lenser, Bobbie R. Rush
Citrus Municipal Court - Dolores S. Bradley
County Counsel - Roger M. Whitby, June E. Hove
District Attorney - Pamela S. Quinones
Engineer Facilities - Charles E. High
Fire - Glenn E. Cutler, William Fullmer, Thomas R. King, Lloyd L. Leyh, Fiataua Mua, Michael Newman, Karl K. Nobuyuki, Selkirk B. Parazette, Phillip E. Wilder
Flood Control District - John F. Ruben, John M. Tetterer
Harbor/UCLA Medical Center - Gabriele E. Meneghini, Elliotte Noralez, Lois Sanati, Nora L. Taylor
Health Services Administration - Yoshiharu Honkawa, Ronald T. Kanemitsu, Jimmy M. Mendez
Human Resources - Angela T. Blutcher-Ballard, Dennis E. Velia
Internal Services - Roger J. Barnett, Felix Cordova, Robert A. Hannah, Lawrence Harsha, Peter F. Lam, Bobbie Parrish, Jonathon Lee Thomas
Juvenile Court Health Services - Betty J. Hayton
King-Drew Medical Center - Alma D. Bracy, Natasha Bryson, Pearl A. Edwards, Mary Elizabeth Holliday, Patricia A. Patterson, Dorothy Petit, Willetta Wilson
LAC+USC Medical Center - Alma Abapo-Bacus, Ahnal N. Criego, Timothy H. Del Cano, Dorothy Gillis, Clara Green, Robert C. Higgins, Luz P. Jandug, Lucile Johnson, Ronna Jurow, Angela McClair, Jeri L. McKay, Lilia M. Romero, Lola Sorrells, Luzminda S. Wee
Mental Health - Glenda S. Ahhaitty, Hermine A. Bafiera, Wilma L. Benson, John Chen, Lou A. McAdams, Lynda Carol Merritth, Theresa Nguyen, Katrina S. O'Brien, Albert R. Richards, Gabrielle Williams, Dennis Wingfield, Sydney A. Woods

Military & Veterans Affairs - Theodore E. Burton
Museum of Natural History - Harold Wayne Tullis, Edward C. Wilson
Olive View/UCLA Medical Center - Jose V. Mendoza
Parks and Recreation - Lafayette Darton, Tomas C. Quezada
Probation - Amos Bedgood, Merry Eileen Bridges, Paula Foray, Don L. Meyer, Wanda F. Tanner, Maria Varela, Chester Lee Wilcox
Public Defender - Sandra M. Chickman, Robert F. McBirney, Carmen G. Payares
Public Health Program - Shirley Barnett, Rudolpho Caro, Thomas Hooper, Erna Jones, Sharon Pruhs, Yvonne Wiley
Public Library - Felicidad E. Villegas
Public Social Services - Derrick J. Brown, Carol A. Chernack, Miriam J. Dominguez, Carol A. Gonzales, Delores Hendrickson, Samuel M. James Jr., Nasly Junblat, Ming-Ming H. Lee, Luis Mayorga, Bergilio Menor, Louise M. Neyazi, Alfredo Palacios, Martha J. Roberson, Thelma Rodgers, Kathy Shapiro, Dorothy Mae Shepard, Ray Adelbert Waud, Paul L. Williams
Public Works - Robert Andrew Barton, Steven Arthur Chriss, Manuel E. Diaz, Betty L. Flippen, William A. Haglund, Bennie C. Henderson, Donald Y. Milne, Ronald Morris
Rancho Los Amigos Hospital - Roberta L. Broveleit, Edythe M. Grayson, Yvonne L. Johnson, Howard E. McCray, Demetris McCaleb, Wilbur A. Snyder, Andretta Warren-Hayden, Gloria Youngblood
Regional Planning - Paul M. Skophammer
Reg.-Recorder/County Clerk - Patricia Dozier, Elvira B. Rosales
Sheriff - Joseph A. Acevedo, Christy L. Appleby, Gloria Arellanes, Justino L. Badua, Lavoid D. Brown, John P. Craddock, Jim L. Ellis, Marilyn A. Feigley, Rufus S. Horne, Robert Martin Keane, Stephen Robert Keife, Clay J. Landenberger, Samuel E. Patrick, Elisa R. Price, William E. Richards, Ellen May Roe, Nolden J. Smith, Carrie J. Thomas, Vienna T. Wilson, David R. Wyse, John D. Yarbrough
Superior Court/County Clerk - Caridad P. Bumanglag, Martha Cortez, Steven G. Estrada, H. Ronald Hauptman, Robert D. Marsh, Vickie Pastrana, Phyllis Shilaos-Barrett
Treasurer and Tax Collector - Robert T. Thomas
Workforce Dev. Aging & Comm. Svc. - Paulena M. Falealii-Sur
Unidentified County Agency - Barbara J. Steere

L.A. County Public Health Dept. Maintains Accreditation

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) received a five-year reaccreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), according to a statement released by the department.

DPH completed a comprehensive, multi-faceted assessment, which demonstrated ways the department adhered to PHAB quality standards and measures.

"We are pleased to be recognized by the PHAB for achieving national standards that foster effectiveness and promote continuous quality improvement to better serve our communities," said Dr. Barbara Ferrer, director of DPH. "I want to thank our partners, community organizations, and the Board of Supervisors for supporting the valuable work we do," she said.

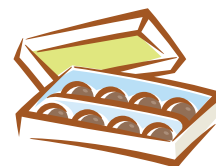
Attention RELAC Members!

RELAC has renewed its discount program with See's Candies. How sweet it is.

Members may purchase See's Candies at a reduced price at any See's Volume Savings Discount Shop. To find a location near you, call (800) 877-7337 and let the See's representative know you are a RELAC member.

You also may find a list of See's Volume Savings Discount Shops on the RELAC website, www.relac.org. Click on the Member Discount tab. Staff also will provide assistance, if needed. Call (800) 537-3522.

Remember, you must show your RELAC membership card at time of purchase.



RV News

by Chickee Nelson

On Thursday, November 7 the RELAC RV'ers got together for a delicious luncheon at the Old Spaghetti Factory, 1431 Buena Vista Street, in Duarte, California.

Twelve retirees attended this luncheon. They were Ron and Betsy Morgon, Leon and Dian Stegall, Dorie Fregeau, Jeanne Klauk, Fred Weinberg, Randy Forney, Janet Cerato, Janice Hayhurst, Mike and Veronica Reyes. The luncheons are normally held the last Thursday of the month, but this month it was switched, so some of the retirees that normally attend were not able to make it.

On a sad note, one of our long-time regulars, Ed Clifton crossed over. He will be missed!! The next luncheon is scheduled for Thursday, January 23, 2025 at the Original Roadhouse Grill in Long Beach. If you have any questions, you may contact Mike Reyes at 909-556-8751.



RELAC members attending the November luncheon were Ron and Betsy Morgon, Leon and Dian Stegall, Dorie Fregeau, Jeanne Klauk, Fred Weinberg, Randy Forney, Janet Cerato, Janice Hayhurst, and Veronica Reyes.

Photo by Mike Reyes

Golf News

By Gil Sandoval

RELAC Golf Director

LA MIRADA GOLF TOURNAMENT – DECEMBER 2, 2024

The La Mirada Golf Course played hard for most players. The exceptions were Kathy Stringer and new player Robert Villar, who handled the course quite well. They were the only ones who bested par for the best rounds of the day.

Villar won the "A" Flight with a good play bringing in net 70. The next two players battled the course for 2nd place, with Eddie Otero edging out Bill Stringer with a net 74. Bill was only one shot back at net 75 for 3rd place.

The "B" Flight was a relatively easy victory for Les Bacon, as he won with a net 75. Following with three shots back was Mario Uribe, who took 2nd place with a net 78. Yours truly finished 3rd with a net 81.

Ernest Jones III easily won the "C" Flight with a net 91 since all of his competitors were either traveling or had medical/family emergencies. Please keep them in your prayers.

The Ladies Flight was a two-player competition with Kathy Stringer playing well and winning with a net 69. She also had the low round of the day. Norma Gutierrez, who had a net 77, took 2nd place. She continues her good play, winning four closest to the pins.

If you have friends that play golf, encourage them to join us! They can access the RELAC website at www.relac.org, and follow the link to Activities (Golf). Please return the entry forms along with payment, as indicated on the form.

The membership rolls of RELAC are decreasing. If you can help recruit new members, especially if they are golfers, we would be more than grateful. So, please take this plea to heart and help us grow!

Next tournament:

Chester Washington Golf Course

January 27, 2025 – 8:00 a.m. Start Time

Entries must be received by January 6, 2025

NOTE: Only ONE GUEST per member. Enclose check for number of golfers @ \$46.00 per golfer. Please make check payable to RELAC and mail to: RELAC, Attn: Golf Tournament, 1000 S. Fremont Avenue, Unit 15, Alhambra, CA 91803-8802.



"What's Happening"

La Bea Tar Pits and Museum

5801 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036
Los Angeles County Resident tickets are available from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday at any museum ticketing desk or kiosk. Daily Senior admission is \$14 per ticket. FREE daily admission for active or retired U.S. military with ID.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036
FREE general admission for all visitors on the second Tuesday of each month, and FREE general admission to L.A. County residents Monday through Friday after 3:00 p.m. (closed on Wednesday). L.A. County Senior residents (65+) with ID \$16 per ticket. FREE admission for active-duty military and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day, through the Blue Star Museums Program.

The Huntington Library

1151 Oxford Road, San Marino, CA 91108.
The first Thursday of every month is Free Day. Admission is Free of charge with advance reservation.

L.A. County Arboretum & Botanic Garden

301 N. Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia, CA 91007. Daily Senior (62+) admission is \$11 per ticket. Contact the Arboretum for Free Ticket information.

Natural History Museum

900 Exposition Park, Los Angeles, CA 90007.
Free admission for Los Angeles County residents Monday – Friday, 3 – 5 p.m. Daily Senior (62+) admission is \$14 per ticket. Free daily admission for active or retired United States military ID. Tickets are available onsite only.

Japanese American National Museum

100 N. Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Thursdays are Free admission from 5 - 8 p.m.; last entry at 7:30 p.m. Every third Thursday of the month is Free admission all day.

Parks & Recreation

Free programs and activities for seniors, which includes multi-level exercise classes and meal programs. Visit the website at Parks.LACounty.gov for information.

Beaches & Harbors

Various programs and activities. For information visit the website at marinadelrey.lacounty.gov or call (424) 526-7900.

RELAC - Golf Tournaments

Chester Washington Golf Course – January 27, 2025

La Mirada Golf Course – March 24, 2025



**RETIRED EMPLOYEES
of LOS ANGELES COUNTY**
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Alhambra, CA 91803-8802

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New RELAC Board

Congratulations to the new slate of officers elected to lead RELAC in 2025.

President: Linda C. Hopkins

Vice President: Bobbie Fesler

Secretary: Victoria Pipkin-Lane

Treasurer: Dyanne Nelson

Immediate Past President: Brian Berger

Past President: Dave L. Muir



RETIRED EMPLOYEES OF LA COUNTY:
**IT'S TIME TO ENROLL
IN YOUR BENEFITS.**

Dental | Vision | Life and AD&D | Supplemental Benefits

ACTION REQUIRED
If you are currently enrolled in RELAC supplemental benefits you need to call in to update your elections with our new and improved program!



▶ For more information, visit www.benefitsdetails.com/RELAC



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