

LEGISLATIVE BILL 538

Approved by the Governor May 25, 1999

Introduced by Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee: Stuhr, 24, Chairperson;
Bourne, 8; Bruning, 3; Crosby, 29; C. Peterson, 35

AN ACT relating to the School Employees Retirement Act; to amend sections 79-902 and 79-951, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998; to change provisions relating to final average compensation, disability, contributing members, and substitute school employees; to define and redefine terms; to eliminate an obsolete reference; to harmonize provisions; to repeal the original sections; and to declare an emergency.

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

Section 1. Section 79-902, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

79-902. For purposes of the School Employees Retirement Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) Accumulated contributions means the sum of all amounts deducted from the compensation of a member and credited to his or her individual account in the School Retirement Fund together with regular interest thereon, compounded monthly, quarterly, semiannually, or annually;

(2) Beneficiary means any person in receipt of a school retirement allowance or other benefit provided by the act;

(3) Member means any person who has an account in the School Retirement Fund;

(4) County school official means the county superintendent or district superintendent and any person serving in his or her office who is required by law to have a teacher's certificate;

(5) Creditable service means prior service for which credit is granted under sections 79-926 to 79-929, service credit purchased under sections 79-933.03 to 79-933.06 and 79-933.08, and all service rendered while a contributing member of the retirement system. Creditable service includes working days, sick days, vacation days, holidays, and any other leave days for which the employee is paid regular wages as part of the employee's agreement with the employer. Creditable service does not include lump-sum payments to the employee upon termination or retirement in lieu of accrued benefits for such days, eligibility and vesting credit, nor service years for which member contributions are withdrawn and not repaid. Creditable service also does not include service rendered by a member for which the retirement board determines that the member was paid less in compensation than the minimum wage as provided in the Wage and Hour Act or service which the board determines was rendered with the intent to defraud the retirement system;

(6) Disability retirement allowance means the annuity paid to a person upon retirement for disability under section 79-952;

(7) Employer means the State of Nebraska or any subdivision thereof or agency of the state or subdivision authorized by law to hire school employees or to pay their compensation;

(8) Fiscal year means any year beginning July 1 and ending June 30 next following;

(9) Regular interest means interest fixed at a rate equal to the bond equivalent yield, as published by the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, of the average accepted auction price for the last auction of fifty-two-week United States treasury bills in effect on the last day of the preceding plan year, which may be credited monthly, quarterly, semiannually, or annually as the board may direct;

(10) Junior school employee means a school employee who has not arrived at his or her twenty-first birthday anniversary on August 15 preceding;

(11) School employee means a contributing member who acquires five hundred sixteen hours or more of service in a fiscal year and thereby earns one-half year of service credit. A contributing member who acquires one thousand thirty-two hours or more of service in a fiscal year shall earn one year of service credit. For purposes of this section, contributing member means the following persons who receive compensation from a public school: (a) Regular employees hired upon a full-time basis which contemplates a workweek of not less than thirty hours; ~~and~~ (b) regular part-time employees hired for not less than sixty hours per month; ~~and~~ (c) school employees having retired pursuant to the School Employees Retirement Act who subsequently provide

compensated service on a regular basis in any capacity. Substitute school employees shall not be considered school employees;

(12) Prior service means service rendered as a school employee in the public schools of the State of Nebraska prior to July 1, 1945;

(13) Public school means any and all schools offering instruction in elementary or high school grades, as defined in section 79-101, which schools are supported by public funds and are wholly under the control and management of the State of Nebraska or any subdivision thereof, including (a) schools or other entities established, maintained, and controlled by the school boards of local school districts, except Class V school districts, (b) any educational service unit, and (c) any other educational institution wholly supported by public funds, except schools under the control and management of the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges, the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, or the community college boards of governors for any community college areas;

(14) Retirement means qualifying for and accepting a school or disability retirement allowance granted under the School Employees Retirement Act;

(15) Retirement board or board means the Public Employees Retirement Board;

(16) Retirement system means the School Retirement System of the State of Nebraska;

(17) Required deposit means the deduction from a member's compensation as provided for in section 79-958 which shall be deposited in the School Retirement Fund;

(18) School year means one fiscal year which includes not less than one thousand thirty-two instructional hours or, in the case of service in the State of Nebraska prior to July 1, 1945, not less than seventy-five percent of the then legal school year;

(19) Senior school employee means a school employee who has arrived at his or her twenty-first birthday anniversary on August 15 preceding;

(20) Service means employment as a school employee and shall not be deemed interrupted by (a) termination at the end of the school year of the contract of employment of an employee in a public school if the employee enters into a contract of employment in any public school, except a school in a Class V school district, for the following school year, (b) temporary or seasonal suspension of service that does not terminate the employee's employment, (c) leave of absence authorized by the employer for a period not exceeding twelve months, (d) leave of absence because of disability, or (e) military service when properly authorized by the retirement board. Service does not include any period of disability for which disability retirement benefits are received under sections 79-951 to 79-953;

(21) School retirement allowance means the total of the savings annuity and the service annuity or formula annuity paid a person who has retired under sections 79-931 to 79-935. The monthly payments shall be payable at the end of each calendar month during the life of a retired member. The first payment shall include all amounts accrued since the effective date of the award of annuity. The last payment shall be at the end of the calendar month in which such member dies or in accordance with the payment option chosen by the member;

(22) Service annuity means payments for life, made in equal monthly installments, derived from appropriations made by the State of Nebraska to the retirement system;

(23) State deposit means the deposit by the state in the retirement system on behalf of any member;

(24) State school official means the Commissioner of Education and his or her professional staff; ~~and the assistant commissioner of education in charge of vocational education and his or her professional staff;~~

(25) Savings annuity means payments for life, made in equal monthly payments, derived from the accumulated contributions of a member;

(26) Emeritus member means a person (a) who has entered retirement under the provisions of the act, including those persons who have retired since July 1, 1945, under any other regularly established retirement or pension system as contemplated by section 79-916, (b) who has thereafter been reemployed in any capacity by a public school, a Class V school district, or a school under the control and management of the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges, the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, or a community college board of governors or has become a state school official or county school official subsequent to such retirement, and (c) who has applied to the board for emeritus membership in the retirement system. The school district or agency shall certify to the retirement board on forms prescribed by the retirement board that the annuitant was reemployed, rendered

a service, and was paid by the district or agency for such services;

(27) Actuarial equivalent means the equality in value of the aggregate amounts expected to be received under different forms of payment. The determinations shall be based on the 1971 Group Annuity Mortality Table reflecting sex-distinct factors blended using twenty-five percent of the male table and seventy-five percent of the female table. An interest rate of seven percent per annum shall be reflected in making these determinations except when a lump-sum settlement is made to an estate. If the lump-sum settlement is made to an estate, the interest rate will be determined by the Moody's Triple A Bond Index as of the prior June 30, rounded to the next lower quarter percent;

(28) Retirement date means the first day of the month following the date upon which a member's request for retirement is received on a retirement application provided by the retirement system if the member has terminated employment in the school system. An application may be filed no more than ninety days in advance of the date on which a member terminates employment in the school system;

(29) Disability retirement date means the first day of the month following the date upon which a member's request for disability retirement is received on a retirement application provided by the retirement system if the member has terminated employment in the school system and has complied with sections 79-951 to 79-954 as such sections refer to disability retirement;

(30) Retirement application means the form approved by the retirement system for acceptance of a member's request for either regular or disability retirement;

(31) Eligibility and vesting credit means credit for years, or a fraction of a year, of participation in a Nebraska government plan for purposes of determining eligibility for benefits under the School Employees Retirement Act. Such credit shall not be included as years of creditable service in the benefit calculation;

(32) Final average compensation means (a) for full-time employees, the member's total compensation subject to required deposits for the three fiscal years in which such compensation was the highest divided by thirty-six and (b) for part-time employees, the member's total adjusted compensation subject to required deposits for the three fiscal years in which such adjusted compensation was the highest divided by thirty-six. In the determination of final average compensation for members who retire on or after the effective date of this act, that part of a member's compensation for the fiscal year which exceeds the member's compensation with the same employer for the preceding fiscal year by more than ten percent shall be excluded unless the member experienced a substantial change in employment position. If a member has such compensation for less than three such fiscal years, his or her final average compensation shall be determined by dividing his or her total compensation in all such years by the total number of months of his or her creditable service therefor. Adjusted compensation for any year shall be equal to actual pay times the ratio of one to the actual credited service for such year.

Payments under the Retirement Incentive Plan pursuant to section 79-855 and Staff Development Assistance pursuant to section 79-856 shall not be included in the determination of final average compensation;

(33) Plan year means the twelve-month period beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30 of the following year;

(34) Current benefit means the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to section 79-947.02;

(35) Initial benefit means the retirement benefit calculated at the time of retirement;

(36) Surviving spouse means (a) the spouse married to the member on the date of the member's death or (b) the spouse or former spouse of the member if survivorship rights are provided under a qualified domestic relations order filed with the board pursuant to the Spousal Pension Rights Act. The spouse or former spouse shall supersede the spouse married to the member on the date of the member's death as provided under a qualified domestic relations order. If the benefits payable to the spouse or former spouse under a qualified domestic relations order are less than the value of benefits entitled to the surviving spouse, the spouse married to the member on the date of the member's death shall be the surviving spouse for the balance of the benefits;

(37)(a) Compensation means gross wages or salaries payable to the member for personal services performed during the plan year. Compensation does not include amounts which the retirement board determines were fraudulently obtained, compensation for unused sick leave or unused vacation leave converted to cash payments, insurance premiums converted into cash

payments, reimbursement for expenses incurred, fringe benefits, or bonuses for services not actually rendered, including, but not limited to, early retirement inducements, cash awards, and severance pay, except for retroactive salary payments paid pursuant to court order, arbitration, or litigation and grievance settlements. Compensation includes overtime pay, member retirement contributions, and amounts contributed by the member to plans under sections 125, 403(b), and 457 of the Internal Revenue Code or any other section of the code which defers or excludes such amounts from income.

(b) Compensation in excess of the limitations set forth in section 401(a)(17) of the Internal Revenue Code shall be disregarded. For an employee who was a member of the retirement system before the first plan year beginning after December 31, 1995, the limitation on compensation shall not be less than the amount which was allowed to be taken into account under the retirement system as in effect on July 1, 1993; and

(38) Termination of employment occurs on the date on which the members' employer determines that the member's employer-employee relationship with the employer is dissolved. The employer shall notify the board in writing within two weeks after the date such a termination is deemed to have occurred. Termination of employment does not include ceasing active work at the end of the school year if the member will return to active work during the following school year with any school district under the retirement system;

(39) Disability means an inability to engage in a substantially gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or be of a long and indefinite duration; and

(40) Substitute school employee means a person hired by a public school on an intermittent basis to assume the duties of regular school employees due to the temporary absence of the regular school employees.

Sec. 2. Section 79-951, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

79-951. A member shall be retired on account of disability, either upon his or her own application or the application of his or her employer or a person acting in his or her behalf, if a medical examination, made at the expense of the retirement system and conducted by a competent disinterested physician legally authorized to practice medicine under the laws of the state in which he or she practices, selected by the retirement board, shows and the physician certifies to the retirement board that the member is ~~physically or mentally incapacitated for the further performance of duty as a school employee and ought to be retired~~ unable to engage in a substantially gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or be of a long and indefinite duration. The member shall have one year from the date he or she terminates employment in a public school located in Nebraska in which to make application for disability retirement benefits. Any application for retirement on account of disability shall be made on a retirement application provided by the retirement system. Upon approval by the board, benefits shall begin on the disability retirement date.

Sec. 3. Original sections 79-902 and 79-951, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, are repealed.

Sec. 4. Since an emergency exists, this act takes effect when passed and approved according to law.