

LEGISLATIVE BILL 1192

Approved by the Governor March 21, 2000

Introduced by Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee: Stuhr, 24, Chairperson;
Bourne, 8; Bruning, 3; Wehrbein, 2; Wickersham, 49

AN ACT relating to retirement; to amend sections 24-709.01, 79-906, 79-911, 79-917, 79-956, 79-963, 81-2014, 81-2016, 81-2021, 84-1301, 84-1305.01, 84-1307, 84-1503, and 84-1512, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, sections 23-2306, 23-2312, 24-704, 24-707, 79-905, and 79-907, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, and sections 23-2301, 24-701, 24-706, 79-902, 79-951, and 79-960, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999; to change provisions relating to requirements for reporting retirement information; to redefine terms; to provide, change, and eliminate powers and duties of employers and the Public Employees Retirement Board; to harmonize provisions; to repeal the original sections; to outright repeal section 79-961, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska; and to declare an emergency.

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

Section 1. Section 23-2301, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, is amended to read:

23-2301. For purposes of the County Employees Retirement Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1)(a) Compensation means gross wages or salaries payable to the member for personal services performed during the plan year. Compensation does not include 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;

(2) Date of adoption of the retirement system by each county means the first day of the month next following the date of approval of the retirement system by the county board or January 1, 1987, whichever is earlier;

(3) Date of disability means the date on which a member is determined by the board to be disabled;

(4) 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;

(5) Eligibility and vesting credit means credit for years, or a fraction of a year, of participation in a Nebraska governmental plan for purposes of determining membership in the retirement system and vesting the employer account;

(6) Employees means all persons or officers who are employed by a county of the State of Nebraska on a permanent basis, persons employed as provided in section 2-1608, all elected officers of a county, and such other persons or officers as are classified from time to time as permanent employees by the county board of the county by whom they are employed, except that employees does not include judges, employees or officers of any county having a population in excess of one hundred fifty thousand inhabitants, or, except as provided in section 23-2306, persons making contributions to the School Retirement System of the State of Nebraska;

(7) Five-year break in service means a period of five consecutive one-year breaks in service;

(8) Full-time employee means an employee who is employed to work one-half or more of the regularly scheduled hours during each pay period;

(9) Future service means service following the date of adoption of the retirement system;

(10) Group annuity contract means the contract issued by one or more life insurance companies to the board in order to provide the future service benefits described in the act;

(11) Guaranteed investment contract means an investment contract or account offering a return of principal invested plus interest at a specified rate. For investments made after July 19, 1996, guaranteed investment contract does not include direct obligations of the United States or its instrumentalities, bonds, participation certificates or other obligations of the Federal National Mortgage Association, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, or the Government National Mortgage Association, or collateralized mortgage obligations and other derivative securities. This subdivision shall not be construed to require the liquidation of investment contracts or accounts entered into prior to July 19, 1996;

(12) One-year break in service means a plan year during which the member has not completed more than five hundred hours of service;

(13) Part-time employee means an employee who is employed to work less than one-half of the regularly scheduled hours during each pay period;

(14) Plan year means the twelve-month period beginning on January 1 and ending on December 31;

(15) Prior service means service prior to the date of adoption of the retirement system;

(16) Regular interest means the rate of interest earned each calendar year as determined by the retirement board in conformity with actual and expected earnings on the investments;

(17) Required contribution means the deduction to be made from the compensation of employees as provided in the act;

(18) Retirement means qualifying for and terminating employment after becoming qualified to receive the retirement allowance granted under the act;

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

(20) Retirement system means the Retirement System for Nebraska Counties;

(21) Service means the actual total length of employment as an employee and is not deemed to be interrupted by (a) temporary or seasonal suspension of service that does not terminate the employee's employment, (b) leave of absence authorized by the employer for a period not exceeding twelve months, (c) leave of absence because of disability, or (d) 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 section 23-2315;

(22) Straight life annuity means an ordinary annuity, payable for the life of the primary annuitant only, and terminating at his or her death without refund or death benefit of any kind;

(23) 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; and

(24) Termination of employment occurs on the date on which a county which is a member of the retirement system determines that its employer-employee relationship with an employee is dissolved. The county 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 occur if an employee whose employer-employee relationship with a county is dissolved enters into an employer-employee relationship with the same or another county which participates in the Retirement System for Nebraska Counties and there are less than one hundred twenty days between the date when the employee's employer-employee relationship ceased with the county and the date when the employer-employee relationship commenced with the same or another county which qualifies the employee for participation in the plan. It shall be the responsibility of the current employer to notify the board ~~in writing~~ of such change in employment and provide the board with such information as the board deems necessary. If the board determines that termination of employment has not occurred and a termination benefit has been paid to a member of the retirement system pursuant to section 23-2319, the

board shall require the member who has received such benefit to repay the benefit to the retirement system.

Sec. 2. Section 23-2306, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

23-2306. (1) The membership of the retirement system shall be composed of (a) all full-time employees who have been employees for a period of twelve continuous months, except that full-time elected officials shall be members on taking office, (b) all full-time or part-time employees who have attained the age of twenty-five, have been employed for a total of twelve months within a five-year period, and exercise the option to join the retirement system, and (c) all part-time elected officials who exercise the option to join the retirement system. A part-time employee who exercises the option to join the retirement system shall remain in the system until termination or retirement.

(2) Within the first thirty days of employment, a full-time employee may apply to the board for eligibility and vesting credit for years of participation in another Nebraska governmental plan, as defined by section 414(d) of the Internal Revenue Code. During the years of participation in the other Nebraska governmental plan, the employee must have been a full-time employee, as defined in the Nebraska governmental plan in which the credit was earned.

(3) Any employee who qualifies for membership in the retirement system pursuant to this section may not be disqualified for membership in the retirement system solely because such employee also maintains separate employment which qualifies the employee for membership in another public retirement system, nor may membership in this retirement system disqualify such an employee from membership in another public retirement system solely by reason of separate employment which qualifies such employee for membership in this retirement system.

(4) A full-time or part-time employee of a city, village, or township who becomes a county employee pursuant to a merger of services shall receive credit for his or her years of employment with the city, village, or township for purposes of the membership provisions of this section and shall receive eligibility and vesting credit for his or her years of participation in a Nebraska governmental plan, as defined by section 414(d) of the Internal Revenue Code, of the city, village, or township.

(5) Information necessary to determine membership in the retirement system shall be provided by the employer.

Sec. 3. Section 23-2312, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

23-2312. (1) The board or an entity designated by the board director of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems shall keep a complete record of all members with respect to names, current addresses, ages, contributions, and any other facts as may be necessary in the administration of the County Employees Retirement Act. The information in the records shall be provided by the employer in an accurate and verifiable form, as specified by the director. The director may, from time to time, carry out sampling procedures to verify the accuracy of such information. For the purpose of obtaining such facts and information, the board and its designee director shall have access to the records of the various counties and state departments and agencies. A certified copy of a birth certificate or delayed birth certificate shall be prima facie evidence of the age of the person named in the certificate.

(2) The director shall develop and implement an employer education program using principles generally accepted by public employee retirement systems so that all employers have the knowledge and information necessary to prepare and file reports as the board requires.

Sec. 4. Section 24-701, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, is amended to read:

24-701. For purposes of the Judges Retirement Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) Fund means the Nebraska Retirement Fund for Judges;

(2) Judge means and includes (a) all duly elected or appointed Chief Justices or judges of the Supreme Court and judges of the district courts of Nebraska who serve in such capacity on and after January 3, 1957, (b)(i) all duly appointed judges of the Nebraska Workmen's Compensation Court who served in such capacity on and after September 20, 1957, and prior to July 17, 1986, and (ii) judges of the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Court who serve in such capacity on and after July 17, 1986, (c) judges of separate juvenile courts, (d) judges of the county courts of the respective counties who serve in such capacity on and after January 5, 1961, except acting judges of the county court appointed pursuant to section 24-507, (e) judges of the county court and

clerk magistrates who were associate county judges and members of the fund at the time of their appointment as clerk magistrates, (f) judges of municipal courts established by Chapter 26, article 1, who served in such capacity on and after October 23, 1967, and prior to July 1, 1985, and (g) judges of the Court of Appeals;

(3) Prior service means all the periods of time any person has served as a (a) judge of the Supreme Court or judge of the district court prior to January 3, 1957, (b) judge of the county court prior to January 5, 1961, (c) judge of the Nebraska Workmen's Compensation Court prior to September 20, 1957, (d) judge of the separate juvenile court, or (e) judge of the municipal court prior to October 23, 1967;

(4)(a) Current service means the period of service (i) any judge of the Supreme Court or judge of the district court serves in such capacity from and after January 3, 1957, (ii)(A) any judge of the Nebraska Workmen's Compensation Court served in such capacity from and after September 20, 1957, and prior to July 17, 1986, and (B) any judge of the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Court serves in such capacity on and after July 17, 1986, (iii) any county judge serves in such capacity from and after January 5, 1961, (iv) any judge of a separate juvenile court serves in such capacity, (v) any judge of the municipal court served in such capacity subsequent to October 23, 1967, and prior to July 1, 1985, (vi) any judge of the county court or associate county judge serves in such capacity subsequent to January 4, 1973, (vii) any clerk magistrate, who was an associate county judge and a member of the fund at the time of appointment as a clerk magistrate, serves in such capacity from and after July 1, 1986, and (viii) any judge of the Court of Appeals serves in such capacity on or after September 6, 1991.

(b) Current service shall not be deemed to be interrupted by (i) temporary or seasonal suspension of service that does not terminate the employee's employment, (ii) leave of absence authorized by the employer for a period not exceeding twelve months, (iii) leave of absence because of disability, or (iv) military service, when properly authorized by the board. Current service does not include any period of disability for which disability retirement benefits are received under section 24-709;

(5) Military service means active service of (a) any judge of the Supreme Court or judge of the district court in any of the armed forces of the United States during a war or national emergency prior or subsequent to September 18, 1955, if such service commenced while such judge was holding the office of judge, (b) any judge of the Nebraska Workmen's Compensation Court or the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Court in any of the armed forces of the United States during a war or national emergency prior or subsequent to September 20, 1957, if such service commenced while such judge was holding the office of judge, (c) any judge of the municipal court in any of the armed forces of the United States during a war or national emergency prior or subsequent to October 23, 1967, and prior to July 1, 1985, if such service commenced while such judge was holding the office of judge, (d) any judge of the county court or associate county judge in any of the armed forces of the United States during a war or national emergency prior or subsequent to January 4, 1973, if such service commenced while such judge was holding the office of judge, (e) any clerk magistrate, who was an associate county judge and a member of the fund at the time of appointment as a clerk magistrate, in any of the armed forces of the United States during a war or national emergency on or after July 1, 1986, if such service commenced while such clerk magistrate was holding the office of clerk magistrate, and (f) any judge of the Court of Appeals in any of the armed forces of the United States during a war or national emergency on or after September 6, 1991, if such service commenced while such judge was holding the office of judge. The board shall have the power to determine when a national emergency exists or has existed for the purpose of applying this definition and provision;

(6) Creditable service means the total number of years served as a judge, including prior service, military service, and current service, computed to the nearest one-twelfth year. For current service prior to the time that the member has contributed the required percentage of salary until the maximum benefit as limited by section 24-710 has been earned, creditable service does not include current service for which member contributions are not made or are withdrawn and not repaid;

(7)(a) Compensation means the statutory salary of a judge or the salary being received by such judge pursuant to law. Compensation does not include 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 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;

(8) Beneficiary means a person so designated by a judge in the last ~~written~~ designation of beneficiary on file with the board or, if no designated person survives or if no designation is on file, the estate of such judge;

(9) Normal form annuity means a series of equal monthly payments payable at the end of each calendar month during the life of a retired judge as provided in sections 24-707 and 24-710, except as provided in section 42-1107. The first payment shall include all amounts accrued since the effective date of the award of the annuity. The last payment shall be at the end of the calendar month in which such judge dies. If at the time of death the amount of annuity payments such judge has received is less than contributions to the fund made by such judge, plus regular interest, the difference shall be paid to the beneficiary or estate;

(10) Board means the Public Employees Retirement Board;

(11) Member means a judge eligible to participate in the retirement system established under the Judges Retirement Act;

(12) Original member means a judge who first served as a judge prior to December 25, 1969, who does not elect to become a future member pursuant to subsection (8) of section 24-703 or section 24-710.01, and who was retired on or before December 31, 1992;

(13) Future member means a judge who first served as a judge on or after December 25, 1969, or means a judge who first served as a judge prior to December 25, 1969, who elects to become a future member on or before June 30, 1970, as provided in subsection (8) of section 24-703 or section 24-710.01;

(14) Final average compensation means the average monthly compensation for the three twelve-month periods of service as a judge in which compensation was the greatest or, in the event of a judge serving less than three twelve-month periods, the average monthly compensation for such judge's period of service;

(15) 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;

(16) Normal retirement date means the first day of the month following attainment of age sixty-five;

(17) Actuarial equivalence means the equality in value of the aggregate amounts expected to be received under different forms of payment. The determinations are to be based on the 1971 Group Annuity Mortality Table reflecting sex-distinct factors blended using seventy-five percent of the male table and twenty-five percent of the female table. An interest rate of seven percent per annum shall be reflected in making these determinations;

(18) Current benefit means (a) until July 1, 2000, the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to section 24-710.08 and (b) on or after July 1, 2000, the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to the ~~act~~ Judges Retirement Act;

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

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

(21) Retirement system or system means the Nebraska Judges Retirement System as provided in the Judges Retirement Act;

(22) 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 the 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; and

(23) Termination of employment occurs on the date on which the State Court Administrator's office determines that the judge's employer-employee relationship with the State of Nebraska is dissolved. The State Court Administrator's office shall notify the board ~~in writing~~ within two weeks after the date such a termination is deemed to have occurred.

Sec. 5. Section 24-704, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

24-704. (1) The general administration of the retirement system for judges provided for in the Judges Retirement Act, except the investment of funds, is hereby vested in the board. The Auditor of Public Accounts shall make an annual audit of the retirement system and file an annual report of its condition with the Clerk of the Legislature. Each member of the Legislature shall receive a copy of the annual report by making a request for such report to the Auditor of Public Accounts. The board shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the Judges Retirement Act.

(2)(a) The board shall employ a director and such assistants and employees as may be necessary to efficiently discharge the duties imposed by the act. The director shall keep a record of all acts and proceedings taken by the board.

(b) ~~The director He or she~~ shall keep a complete record of all members with respect to name, current address, age, contributions, length of service, compensation, and any other facts as may be necessary in the administration of the act. The information in the records shall be provided by the State Court Administrator in an accurate and verifiable form, as specified by the director. The director may, from time to time, carry out sampling procedures to verify the accuracy of such information. For the purpose of obtaining such facts and information, the director shall have access to the records of the various state departments and agencies. A certified copy of a birth certificate or delayed birth certificate shall be prima facie evidence of the age of the person named in the certificate.

(c) The director shall develop and implement an employer education program using principles generally accepted by public employee retirement systems so that all employers have the knowledge and information necessary to prepare and file reports as the board requires.

(3) Information necessary to determine membership in the retirement system shall be provided by the State Court Administrator.

(4) Any funds of the retirement system available for investment shall be invested by the Nebraska Investment Council pursuant to the Nebraska Capital Expansion Act and the Nebraska State Funds Investment Act. Payment for investment services by the council shall be charged directly against the gross investment returns of the funds. Charges so incurred shall not be a part of the board's annual budget request. The amounts of payment for such services, as of December 31 of each year, shall be reported not later than March 31 of the following year to the council, the board, and the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee. The state investment officer shall sell any such securities upon request from the director so as to provide money for the payment of benefits or annuities.

Sec. 6. Section 24-706, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, is amended to read:

24-706. (1) Upon termination of employment, any member whose service is terminated prior to age sixty-five for any cause other than death or disability may, upon ~~written~~ request to the board:

(a) Have returned to him or her the total amount of contributions which he or she has made to the fund, plus regular interest, and the return of such contributions to such judge shall preclude such judge from any benefits under the Judges Retirement Act unless and until such judge again serves in such capacity and repays, commencing within three years after rejoining the retirement system and prior to five years after rejoining the retirement system or prior to termination of employment, whichever is first, part or all of the amount withdrawn plus interest which would have accrued on such amount under the retirement system. If the member chooses not to repay such withdrawals with interest, the member shall enter the retirement system as a new member with no prior rights; or

(b) Leave his or her contributions in the fund and receive a retirement annuity as provided in sections 24-708 and 24-710.

(2) Any member whose service is terminated at or subsequent to age sixty-five shall be considered as beginning normal retirement and annuity payments shall begin as provided in section 24-710.

Sec. 7. Section 24-707, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

24-707. In the event of the death of a judge prior to retirement, if such judge shall have had five or more years of creditable service, the surviving spouse of such judge shall at his or her option be immediately entitled to receive those benefits which the surviving spouse would have been entitled to under subsection (3) of section 24-710 had the judge elected to have the retirement annuity paid as a joint and survivor annuity payable as long as either the judge or the judge's surviving spouse should survive and had the judge retired (1) on the date of death if his or her age at death is sixty-five or more or (2) at age sixty-five if his or her age at death is less than sixty-five. If such option is not exercised by such surviving spouse within ninety days of the judge's death, if there is no surviving spouse, or if the judge has not served for five years, then the beneficiary, or the estate if the judge has not filed a ~~written~~ statement with the board naming a beneficiary, shall be paid a lump sum equal to all contributions to the fund made by such judge plus regular interest. In the event of the death of a judge subsequent to retirement, if such judge has not filed a ~~written~~ statement of intent with the board to elect to receive any other form of annuity which may be provided for by section 24-710, the amount of annuities such judge has received under the provisions of the Judges Retirement Act shall be computed and, if such amount shall be less than the contributions to the fund made by such judge, plus regular interest, the difference shall be paid to the beneficiary or estate. Benefits to which the surviving spouse, beneficiary, or estate of a judge shall be entitled shall commence immediately upon the death of such judge.

Sec. 8. Section 24-709.01, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

24-709.01. All ~~papers~~ documents filed with and proceedings before the Commission on Judicial Qualifications pursuant to sections 24-709 and 24-712 shall be confidential.

Sec. 9. Section 79-902, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, 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 (a) until July 1, 2000, 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 and (b) on or after July 1, 2000, the county superintendent, county school administrator, 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; (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;

(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)(a) Final average compensation means ~~(a)~~ (i) 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)~~ (ii) 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.

(b) In the determination of final average compensation for members who retire on or after May 26, 1999, 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 (i) the member experienced a substantial change in employment position or (ii) the excess compensation occurred as the result of a collective-bargaining agreement between the employer and a recognized collective-bargaining unit or category of school employee.

(c) For purposes of this subdivision, (i) category of school employee means either all certificated employees of the employer or all noncertificated employees of the employer or both and (ii) recognized collective bargaining unit means a group of employees similarly situated with a similar community of interest appropriate for bargaining recognized as such by a school board.

(d) 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.

(e) 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 (a) until July 1, 2000, the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to section 79-947.02 and (b) on or after July 1, 2000, the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to the ~~act~~ School Employees Retirement Act;

(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;

(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 employment~~ 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~~ subsequently provides compensated service on a regular basis in any capacity for any school district other than a Class V school district within the same plan year or within one hundred eighty calendar days after ceasing employment, whichever period is longer;

(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. 10. Section 79-905, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

79-905. The retirement board shall:

(1) Determine the eligibility of an individual to be a member of the retirement system and other questions of fact in the event of dispute between an individual and a department;

(2) Adopt rules and regulations for the management of the board;

(3) Prescribe ~~forms the form in which shall be used by~~ employers to report contributions, hours worked by school employees, payroll information, and other information necessary to carry out the board's duties;

(4) Keep a complete record of all proceedings taken at any meeting of the board;

(5) Employ a director and other assistance as may be necessary in the performance of its duties; and

(6) Obtain actuarial services pursuant to subdivision (2)(e) of

section 84-1503.

Sec. 11. Section 79-906, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-906. (1) The director in charge of the retirement system shall keep a complete record of all members with respect to name, current address, age, contributions, and any other facts as may be necessary in the administration of the School Employees Retirement Act. The information in the records shall be provided by the employer in an accurate and verifiable form, as specified by the director. The director may, from time to time, carry out sampling procedures to verify the accuracy of such information. For the purpose of obtaining such facts and information, the director shall have access to the records of the various employers and state departments and agencies. A certified copy of a birth certificate or delayed birth certificate shall be prima facie evidence of the age of the person named in the certificate.

(2) The director shall develop and implement an employer education program using principles generally accepted by public employee retirement systems so that all employers have the knowledge and information necessary to prepare and file reports as the board requires.

Sec. 12. Section 79-907, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, is amended to read:

79-907. (1)(a) ~~After October 1, 1998, and before October 1, 2000, and on or before October 1 every two years thereafter,~~ the retirement board shall send to each contributing member of the retirement system by certified mail, return receipt requested, a statement of creditable service earned by that member for the two prior fiscal years. The member shall have ninety days after its receipt to dispute such statement and request that the board modify or correct such statement of creditable service earned. If the member does not dispute the statement on or before the ninety days have elapsed, the statement shall be binding upon the member and the member shall be forever barred from challenging such statement thereafter.

(b) On or before October 1, 2001, and every two years thereafter, the retirement board shall send to each contributing member of the retirement system by certified mail, return receipt requested, a statement of creditable service, reported salary, and other such information as is determined by the director of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems to be necessary in calculating the member's retirement benefit. The member shall have ninety days after its receipt to dispute such statement and request that the board modify or correct such statement of information. If the member does not dispute the statement on or before the ninety days have elapsed, the statement shall be binding upon the member and the member shall be forever barred from challenging such statement thereafter.

(c) If the member requests a modification or correction of his or her statement of creditable service information, the member shall provide documentation to the board supporting such modification or correction and provide clear and convincing evidence that the statement is in error. The board shall, within sixty days after receipt of the documentation supporting the modification or correction, determine whether the member has proven by clear and convincing evidence that the statement of creditable service earned shall be modified or corrected. If the board determines that the member has provided clear and convincing evidence, the board shall modify or correct the statement. If the board determines that the member has not provided clear and convincing evidence, the board shall deny the modification or correction. In either case, the board shall notify the member. ~~in writing.~~ The member may appeal the decision of the board pursuant to section 79-950.

(2) After July 1, 1998, and before July 1, 2000, the board shall send to each member of the retirement system by certified mail, return receipt requested, a statement of creditable service earned by that member for all fiscal years prior to the statement required by ~~subsection (1)~~ subdivision (1)(a) of this section, with priority of receipt given to members with the most creditable service and years of participation in the system. The member shall have ninety days after its receipt to dispute such statement and request that the board modify or correct it. Disputes and appeals arising from such statements shall be taken in the same manner and shall require the same standard of proof as provided in ~~subsection (1)~~ subdivision (1)(c) of this section.

(3) The board shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations and prescribe the necessary forms to carry out this section.

Sec. 13. Section 79-911, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-911. Any emeritus member may retire upon his or her ~~written~~ application to the retirement board, to be effective upon the termination of

his or her employment in any public school or in any position covered by the retirement system.

Sec. 14. Section 79-917, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-917. Within the first thirty days of employment, a school employee may apply to the board for eligibility and vesting credit for years of participation in another Nebraska governmental plan, as defined by section 414(d) of the Internal Revenue Code. During the years of participation in the other Nebraska governmental plan, the employee must have been a full-time or a part-time employee as ~~described in section 79-902~~ defined in the Nebraska governmental plan in which the credit was earned. Such credit shall not be included as years of service in the benefit calculation.

Sec. 15. Section 79-951, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, 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 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~~ five years from the date he or she terminates employment in a public school located in Nebraska in which to make application for disability retirement benefits if the disability is related to employment in a public school located in Nebraska. If the disability is not related to a public school located in Nebraska, the member shall have one year from the date he or she terminates employment 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. 16. Section 79-956, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-956. (1) If a member dies before retirement, his or her accumulated contributions shall be paid to his or her estate, to an alternate payee pursuant to a qualified domestic relations order as provided in section 42-1107, or to the person he or she has nominated by ~~written~~ designation duly executed and filed with the retirement board. Except for payment to an alternative payee pursuant to a qualified domestic relations order, if no legal representative or beneficiary ~~designated in writing~~ applies for such accumulated contributions within five years following (a) the deceased member's sixty-fifth birthday if death occurred prior to such date or (b) the date of the deceased member's death if death occurred after the deceased member's sixty-fifth birthday, the contributions shall be forfeited to the retirement system and credited to the Contingent Account at that time.

(2) When the deceased member has not less than twenty years of creditable service regardless of age or dies on or after his or her sixty-fifth birthday and leaves a surviving spouse who has been designated ~~in writing~~ as beneficiary and who, as of the date of the member's death, is the sole surviving primary beneficiary, such beneficiary may elect, within ninety days after the death of the member, to receive an annuity which shall be equal to the amount that would have accrued to the member had he or she elected to have the retirement annuity paid as a joint and survivor annuity payable as long as either the member or the member's spouse should survive and had the member retired (a) on the date of death if his or her age at death is sixty-five years or more or (b) at age sixty-five years if his or her age at death is less than sixty-five years. If the requirements of this subsection are not met, then the beneficiary or the estate, if the member has not filed a ~~written~~ statement with the board naming a beneficiary, shall be paid a lump sum equal to all contributions to the fund made by such member plus regular interest.

(3) Benefits to which a surviving spouse, beneficiary, or estate of a member shall be entitled pursuant to subsections (1) and (2) of this section shall commence immediately upon the death of such member.

Sec. 17. Section 79-960, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, is amended to read:

79-960. Every employer shall deduct and withhold an amount pursuant to section 79-958 from the compensation as a school employee of each member on each payroll period after such school employee becomes a member of the retirement system. The employer, through its proper agents, the

superintendent of the school district or the administrator of a Class I school district, or the secretary of the school board, shall transmit monthly, quarterly, or semiannually if the retirement board so directs a copy of such payroll, in such form as is approved by the retirement board, and a remittance payable to the order of the State Treasurer for all deductions from the compensation of members on such payroll. The remittances may be by ~~draft, money order, check, or otherwise~~ according to rules and regulations adopted and promulgated in a form as specified by the retirement board. The board shall immediately transmit to the State Treasurer all payments received. The board may charge the employer a late fee, not to exceed fifty dollars, if the deduction report, the monthly remittance report, or the monthly money due is not received and properly completed by the date due as prescribed by the board. The board shall charge the employer an amount equal to the interest which would have accrued if the delinquent report causes the employee to lose interest on his or her account. The proceeds of the interest charge shall be used to reimburse the account of each school employee deprived of interest by the delay.

Sec. 18. Section 79-963, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-963. Every employer and school employee shall send to the ~~retirement board~~ director of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems, as specified in section 79-906, upon ~~its~~ request and in the manner required by ~~it~~ the director, such information as ~~the board~~ he or she may require (1) for the identification of school employees and (2) for the determination of the membership of the retirement system and the obligations of the employer and school employee to the retirement system. If an employee who is qualified for membership fails or refuses to file, within one calendar year of becoming a member, in complete form, a membership registration blank properly identifying the member, fifty dollars shall be transferred from such employee's individual account in the School Retirement Fund to the Service Annuity Account.

Sec. 19. Section 81-2014, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

81-2014. For purposes of the Nebraska State Patrol Retirement Act:

(1) Actuarial equivalent means the equality in value of the aggregate amounts expected to be received under different forms of payment or to be received at an earlier retirement age than the normal retirement age. The determinations shall be based on the 1983 Group Annuity Mortality Table reflecting sex-distinct factors blended using seventy-five percent of the male table and twenty-five percent of the female table. An interest rate of seven percent per annum shall be reflected in making the determinations until such percent is amended by the Legislature;

(2) Board means the Public Employees Retirement Board;

(3)(a) Compensation means gross wages or salaries payable to the member for personal services performed during the plan year. Compensation does not include 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. For any officer employed after January 4, 1979, compensation does not include compensation for unused sick leave or unused vacation leave converted to cash payments. Compensation includes overtime pay, member retirement contributions, and amounts contributed by the member to plans under sections 125 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;

(4) Creditable service means service granted pursuant to section 81-2034 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 officer is paid regular wages. Creditable service does not include eligibility and vesting credit nor service years for which member contributions are withdrawn and not repaid;

(5) Current benefit means (a) until July 1, 2000, the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to section 81-2027.04 and (b) on or after July 1, 2000, the initial benefit increased by all adjustments made pursuant to the ~~act~~ Nebraska State Patrol Retirement Act;

(6) 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 Nebraska State Patrol Retirement Act. Such credit shall be used toward the vesting percentage pursuant to subsection (2) of section 81-2031 but shall not be included as years of service in the benefit calculation;

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

(8) Officer means an officer provided for in sections 81-2001 to 81-2009;

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

(10) 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;

(11) Retirement system or system means the Nebraska State Patrol Retirement System as provided in the act;

(12) Service means employment as a member of the Nebraska State Patrol and shall not be deemed to be interrupted by (a) temporary or seasonal suspension of service that does not terminate the employee's employment, (b) leave of absence authorized by the employer for a period not exceeding twelve months, (c) leave of absence because of disability, or (d) military service, when properly authorized by the board. Service does not include any period of disability for which disability retirement benefits are received under subsection (1) of section 81-2025;

(13) Surviving spouse means (a) the spouse married to the member on the date of the member's death if married for at least one year prior to death or if married on the date of the member's retirement 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; and

(14) Termination of employment occurs on the date on which the Nebraska State Patrol determines that the officer's employer-employee relationship with the patrol is dissolved. The Nebraska State Patrol 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 employment with the Nebraska State Patrol if the officer returns to regular employment with the Nebraska State Patrol within the same plan year or within one hundred twenty days, whichever period is longer.

Sec. 20. Section 81-2016, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

81-2016. (1) Every member of the Nebraska State Patrol who was employed by the State of Nebraska as such, on September 7, 1947, and every person employed as a member of such patrol thereafter, shall be a member of this system.

(2) Within the first thirty days of employment, a member may apply to the board for eligibility and vesting credit for years of participation in another Nebraska governmental plan, as defined by section 414(d) of the Internal Revenue Code. During the years of participation in the other Nebraska governmental plan, the employee must have been a full-time employee, as defined in the Nebraska governmental plan in which the credit was earned.

(3) Any officer who qualifies for membership pursuant to subsection (1) of this section may not be disqualified for membership in the retirement system solely because such officer also maintains separate employment which qualifies the officer for membership in another public retirement system, nor may membership in this retirement system disqualify such an officer from membership in another public retirement system solely by reason of separate employment which qualifies such officer for membership in this retirement system.

(4) Information necessary to determine membership shall be provided by the Nebraska State Patrol.

Sec. 21. Section 81-2021, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

81-2021. (1) The director in charge of the system shall keep a

record of all acts and proceedings taken by the board. He or she shall keep a complete record of all members with respect to name, current address, age, contributions, length of service, compensation, and any other facts as may be necessary in the administration of ~~sections 81-2014 to 81-2036~~ the Nebraska State Patrol Retirement Act. The board shall prescribe the form in which such information shall be reported by the Nebraska State Patrol to the board. The information in the records shall be provided by the Nebraska State Patrol in an accurate and verifiable form, as specified by the director. The director may, from time to time, carry out sampling procedures to verify the accuracy of such information. For the purpose of obtaining such facts and information, the director shall have access to the records of the various state departments and agencies. A certified copy of a birth certificate or delayed birth certificate shall be prima facie evidence of the age of the person named in the certificate.

(2) The director shall develop and implement an employer education program using principles generally accepted by public employee retirement systems so that all employers have the knowledge and information necessary to prepare and file reports as the board requires.

Sec. 22. Section 84-1301, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

84-1301. For purposes of the State Employees Retirement Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1)(a) Compensation means gross wages or salaries payable to the member for personal services performed during the plan year. Compensation does not include 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;

(2) Date of disability means the date on which a member is determined to be disabled by the board;

(3) 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 to be of long-continued and indefinite duration;

(4) Eligibility and vesting credit means credit for years, or a fraction of a year, of participation in a Nebraska governmental plan for purposes of determining membership in the system and vesting the employer account;

(5) Employee means any employee of the State Board of Agriculture who is a member of the state retirement system on July 1, 1982, and any person or officer employed by the State of Nebraska whose compensation is paid out of state funds or funds controlled or administered by a state department through any of its executive or administrative officers when acting exclusively in their respective official, executive, or administrative capacities. Employee does not include (a) judges as defined in section 24-701, (b) members of the Nebraska State Patrol, (c) employees of the University of Nebraska, (d) employees of the state colleges, (e) employees of community colleges, (f) employees of the Department of Labor employed prior to July 1, 1984, and paid from funds provided pursuant to Title III of the federal Social Security Act or funds from other federal sources, (g) the Commissioner of Labor employed prior to July 1, 1984, (h) employees of the State Board of Agriculture who are not members of the state retirement system on July 1, 1982, (i) the Nebraska National Guard air and army technicians, (j) persons eligible for membership under the School Retirement System of the State of Nebraska who have not elected to become members of the retirement system pursuant to section 79-920 or been made members of the system pursuant to such section, except that those persons so eligible and who as of September 2, 1973, are contributing to the State Employees Retirement System of the State of Nebraska shall continue as members of such system, or (k) employees of the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education who are eligible for and have elected to become members of a qualified retirement program approved by the commission which is

commensurate with retirement programs at the University of Nebraska. Any individual appointed by the Governor may elect not to become a member of the State Employees Retirement System of the State of Nebraska;

(6) Five-year break in service means five consecutive one-year breaks in service;

(7) Full-time employee means an employee who is employed to work one-half or more of the regularly scheduled hours during each pay period;

(8) Fund means the State Employees Retirement Fund created by section 84-1309;

(9) Group annuity contract means the contract or contracts issued by one or more life insurance companies to the board in order to provide the benefits described in sections 84-1319, 84-1320, 84-1321, 84-1323, and 84-1323.01;

(10) Guaranteed investment contract means an investment contract or account offering a return of principal invested plus interest at a specified rate. For investments made after July 19, 1996, guaranteed investment contract does not include direct obligations of the United States or its instrumentalities, bonds, participation certificates or other obligations of the Federal National Mortgage Association, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, or the Government National Mortgage Association, or collateralized mortgage obligations and other derivative securities. This subdivision shall not be construed to require the liquidation of investment contracts or accounts entered into prior to July 19, 1996;

(11) One-year break in service means a plan year during which the member has not completed more than five hundred hours of service;

(12) Part-time employee means an employee who is employed to work less than one-half of the regularly scheduled hours during each pay period;

(13) Plan year means the twelve-month period beginning on January 1 and ending on December 31;

(14) Prior service means service before January 1, 1964;

(15) Regular interest means the rate of interest earned each calendar year commencing January 1, 1975, as determined by the retirement board in conformity with actual and expected earnings on the investments;

(16) Required contribution means the deduction to be made from the compensation of employees as provided in section 84-1308;

(17) Retirement means qualifying for and terminating employment after becoming qualified to receive the retirement allowance granted under the State Employees Retirement Act;

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

(19) Retirement system means the State Employees Retirement System of the State of Nebraska;

(20) Service means the actual total length of employment as an employee and shall not be deemed to be interrupted by (a) temporary or seasonal suspension of service that does not terminate the employee's employment, (b) leave of absence authorized by the employer for a period not exceeding twelve months, (c) leave of absence because of disability, or (d) 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 section 84-1317;

(21) State department means any department, bureau, commission, or other division of state government not otherwise specifically defined or exempted in the act, the employees and officers of which are not already covered by a retirement plan;

(22) Straight life annuity means an ordinary annuity payable for the life of the primary annuitant only and terminating at his or her death without refund or death benefit of any kind;

(23) 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; and

(24) Termination of employment occurs on the date on which the agency which employs the member determines that the member's employer-employee relationship with the State of Nebraska is dissolved. The agency which employs the member 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 occur if an employee whose employer-employee relationship with the State of Nebraska is dissolved enters into an employer-employee relationship with the same or another agency of the State of Nebraska and there are less than one hundred twenty days between the date when the employee's employer-employee relationship ceased with the state and the date when the employer-employee relationship commenced with the same or another agency which qualifies the employee for participation in the plan. It shall be the responsibility of the current employer to notify the board ~~in writing~~ of such change in employment and provide the board with such information as the board deems necessary. If the board determines that termination of employment has not occurred and a termination benefit has been paid to a member of the retirement system pursuant to section 84-1321, the board shall require the member who has received such benefit to repay the benefit to the retirement system.

Sec. 23. Section 84-1305.01, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

84-1305.01. (1) The board or an entity designated by the board director of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems shall keep a complete record of all members with respect to name, current address, age, contributions, and any other facts as may be necessary in the administration of the State Employees Retirement Act. The information in the records shall be provided by the employer in an accurate and verifiable form, as specified by the director. The director may, from time to time, carry out sampling procedures to verify the accuracy of such information. For the purpose of obtaining such facts and information, the board and its designee director shall have access to the records of the various state departments and agencies. A certified copy of a birth certificate or delayed birth certificate shall be prima facie evidence of the age of the person named in the certificate.

(2) The director shall develop and implement an employer education program using principles generally accepted by public employee retirement systems so that all employers have the knowledge and information necessary to prepare and file reports as the board requires.

Sec. 24. Section 84-1307, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

84-1307. (1) The membership of the retirement system shall be composed of (a) all permanent full-time employees who have twenty-four continuous months of service and who have attained the age of thirty and (b) all permanent full-time or permanent part-time employees who have twelve months of service within a five-year period, who have attained the age of twenty, and who exercise the option to join the retirement system. An employee who exercises the option to join the retirement system pursuant to this section shall remain in the retirement system until his or her termination of employment or retirement.

(2) For purposes of this section, (a) permanent full-time employees includes employees of the Legislature or Legislative Council who work one-half or more of the regularly scheduled hours during each pay period of the legislative session and (b) permanent part-time employees includes employees of the Legislature or Legislative Council who work less than one-half of the regularly scheduled hours during each pay period of the legislative session.

(3) Within the first thirty days of employment, a full-time employee may apply to the board for eligibility and vesting credit for years of participation in another Nebraska governmental plan, as defined by section 414(d) of the Internal Revenue Code. During the years of participation in the other Nebraska governmental plan, the employee must have been a full-time employee, as defined in the Nebraska governmental plan in which the credit was earned.

(4) Any employee who qualifies for membership in the retirement system pursuant to this section may not be disqualified for membership in the retirement system solely because such employee also maintains separate employment which qualifies the employee for membership in another public retirement system, nor may membership in this retirement system disqualify such an employee from membership in another public employment system solely by reason of separate employment which qualifies such employee for membership in this retirement system.

(5) Information necessary to determine membership in the retirement system shall be provided by the employer.

Sec. 25. Section 84-1503, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

84-1503. (1) It shall be the duty of the Public Employees Retirement Board:

(a) To administer the retirement systems provided for in the County Employees Retirement Act, the Judges Retirement Act, the Nebraska State Patrol Retirement Act, the School Employees Retirement Act, and the State Employees Retirement Act. The agency for the administration of the retirement systems and under the direction of the board shall be known and may be cited as the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems;

(b) To appoint a director to administer the systems under the direction of the board. The appointment shall be subject to the approval of the Governor and a majority of the Legislature. The director shall be qualified by training and have at least five years of experience in the administration of a qualified public or private employee retirement plan. The director shall not be a member of the board. The salary of the director shall be set by the board. The director shall serve without term and may be removed by the board;

(c) To provide for an equitable allocation of expenses among the retirement systems administered by the board, and all expenses shall be provided from the investment income earned by the various retirement funds unless alternative sources of funds to pay expenses are specified by law;

(d) To administer the deferred compensation program authorized in section 84-1504;

(e) To hire an attorney, admitted to the Nebraska State Bar Association, to advise the board in the administration of the retirement systems listed in subdivision (a) of this subsection;

(f) To adopt and implement procedures for reporting information by employers, as well as sampling and monitoring procedures. standards which shall ensure the accuracy, timeliness, and verifiability of information which is received from agencies, counties, school districts, and other public entities whose employees participate in retirement systems administered by the board. The information necessary to determine membership shall be provided by the employer. The board shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations and prescribe such forms necessary to carry out this subdivision;

(g) To administer the service award benefit programs authorized in the Volunteer Emergency Responders Recruitment and Retention Act; and

(h) To prescribe and furnish forms for the public retirement system plan reports required to be filed pursuant to sections 2-3228, 12-101, 14-567, 14-1805.01, 14-2111, 15-1017, 16-1017, 16-1037, 19-3501, 23-1118, 23-3526, 71-1631.02, and 79-987 and to notify the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee of the Legislature of the failure of any governmental entity to file such reports.

(2) In administering the retirement systems listed in subdivision (1)(a) of this section, it shall be the duty of the board:

(a) To determine, based on information provided by the employer, the prior service annuity, if any, for each person who is an employee of the county on the date of adoption of the retirement system;

(b) To determine the eligibility of an individual to be a member of the retirement system and other questions of fact in the event of a dispute between an individual and the individual's employer;

(c) To adopt and promulgate rules and regulations for the management of the board;

(d) To keep a complete record of all proceedings taken at any meeting of the board;

(e) To obtain, by a competitive, formal, and sealed bidding process through the materiel division of the Department of Administrative Services, actuarial services on behalf of the State of Nebraska as may be necessary in the administration and development of the retirement systems. Any contract for actuarial services shall contain a provision allowing the actuary, without prior approval of the board, to perform actuarial studies of the systems as requested by entities other than the board, if notice, which does not identify the entity or substance of the request, is given to the board, all costs are paid by the requesting entity, results are provided to the board upon being made public, and such actuarial studies do not interfere with the actuary's ongoing responsibility to the board. The term of the contract shall be for up to three years. A competitive, formal, and sealed bidding process shall be completed at least once in every three years, unless the board determines that such a process would not be cost-effective under the circumstances and that the actuarial services performed have been satisfactory, in which case the contract may also contain an option for renewal without a competitive, formal, and sealed bidding process for up to three additional years. An actuary under contract for the State of Nebraska shall be a member of the American Academy of Actuaries;

(f) To direct the State Treasurer to transfer funds, as an expense of the retirement systems, to the Legislative Council Retirement Study Fund.

Such transfer shall occur beginning on or after July 31, 1992, and at intervals of not less than ten years and not more than fifteen years and shall be in such amounts as the Legislature shall direct, except that up to seventy-five thousand dollars may be transferred in FY1993-94 to assist in completing the study authorized in Legislative Resolution 328, Ninety-second Legislature, Second Session, 1992;

(g) To adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to carry out the provisions of each retirement system described in subdivision (1)(a) of this section, which shall include, but not be limited to, the crediting of military service, direct rollover distributions, and the acceptance of rollovers;

(h) To obtain, by a competitive, formal, and sealed bidding process through the materiel division of the Department of Administrative Services, auditing services for a separate compliance audit of the retirement systems to be completed by December 31, 1997, and every four years thereafter. The compliance audit shall be in addition to the annual audit conducted by the Auditor of Public Accounts. The compliance audit shall include, but not be limited to, an examination of records, files, and other documents and an evaluation of all policies and procedures to determine compliance with all state and federal laws. ~~The written~~ A copy of the compliance audit ~~report~~ shall be given to the Governor, the board, and the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee and shall be presented to the committee at a public hearing;

(i) To adopt and promulgate rules and regulations for the adjustment of contributions or benefits, which shall include, but not be limited to: (i) The procedures for refunding contributions, adjusting future contributions or benefit payments, and requiring additional contributions or repayment of benefits; (ii) the process for a member, member's beneficiary, employee, or employer to dispute an adjustment to contributions or benefits; and (iii) notice provided to all affected persons. All notices shall be sent prior to an adjustment and shall describe the process for disputing an adjustment to contributions or benefits; and

(j) To administer all retirement system plans in a manner which will maintain each plan's status as a qualified plan pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code. The board shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations necessary or appropriate to maintain such status including, but not limited to, rules or regulations which restrict discretionary or optional contributions to a plan or which limit distributions from a plan.

(3) The board and the Nebraska Investment Council shall jointly have an analysis made of the investment return that has been achieved on the assets of each retirement system administered by the board. The analysis shall be prepared annually as of January 1. The analysis shall be prepared by an independent private organization which has demonstrated expertise to perform this type of analysis and which is unrelated to any organization offering investment advice or providing investment management services to the retirement system. The analysis may be waived jointly by the board and the council for any retirement system with assets of less than ten million dollars. A copy of the analysis shall be given to the board, the council, and the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee. By March 1 of each year, the analysis shall be presented to the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee.

(4) By March 1 of each year, the board shall prepare a written plan of action and shall present such plan to the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee at a public hearing. The plan shall include, but not be limited to, the board's funding policy, member education and informational programs, the director's duties and the limits on his or her authority, an organizational structure of the office of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems, and the internal control structure of such office to ensure compliance with state and federal laws.

Sec. 26. Section 84-1512, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

84-1512. (1) The Public Employees Retirement Board, for purposes of administering the various retirement systems under its jurisdiction, shall receive from the Department of Administrative Services and other employers such information as is necessary for the efficient and accurate administration of the systems and shall consult with the Department of Administrative Services and other employers as to the form in which the information is to be presented and received by the board. The information in the records shall be provided by the employers in an accurate and verifiable form, as specified by the director of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems. The director may, from time to time, carry out sampling procedures to verify the accuracy of such information and shall have access to records maintained by the Department of Administrative Services on the Nebraska employees information system data base for the purpose of securing names, social security numbers, addresses, ages, salary records, employment dates, and

obtaining any ~~other~~ information which may be necessary to verify the accuracy of information and administer the systems.

(2) The director shall develop and implement an employer education program using principles generally accepted by public employee retirement systems so that all employers have the knowledge and information necessary to prepare and file reports as the board requires.

Sec. 27. Original sections 24-709.01, 79-906, 79-911, 79-917, 79-956, 79-963, 81-2014, 81-2016, 81-2021, 84-1301, 84-1305.01, 84-1307, 84-1503, and 84-1512, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, sections 23-2306, 23-2312, 24-704, 24-707, 79-905, and 79-907, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1998, and sections 23-2301, 24-701, 24-706, 79-902, 79-951, and 79-960, Revised Statutes Supplement, 1999, are repealed.

Sec. 28. The following section is outright repealed: Section 79-961, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska.

Sec. 29. Since an emergency exists, this act takes effect when passed and approved according to law.