



CAPS PER EE



Increased Contributions Equal Increased Security for Vested Rights

CAPS' most critical missions are negotiating competitive salaries and protecting health and retirement benefits. CAPS works hard to maintain a sustainable, secure retirement for State Scientists based on a defined-benefit formula assigned by the state upon their hiring. While CAPS tirelessly fights to protect your retirement benefits, CalPERS administers the fund itself.

In keeping with CAPS' current MOU, Unit 10 employees received a 5% General Salary Increase that took effect July 1. Next July will bring yet another 5% General Salary Increase – the fifth in five years. These pay raises not only affect your current employment but also your future. How? Your pension calculation.

After a life of hard work, everyone deserves a secure, reasonable retirement based on a formula promised to them when they were hired. Employment as a California civil servant means that you receive a certain kind of retirement benefit – one that is guaranteed – through a defined benefit plan. These plans, also known as pensions, promise a specific monthly benefit based on a formula at retirement. The assurance of a defined-benefit plan is what makes civil service retirement so valuable.

Article 8 in the MOU covers all things retirement. For example, Section 8.1 informs you whether your final compensation is based on your final year or final three years of compensation (this is where the general salary increases matter – the more you make prior to retirement, the more you make in retirement).

The MOU also called for a slight increase in employee pension contributions from 8% to 8.5% of salary above \$513 per month. This reflects half the cost required to maintain your pension. In keeping with state law, the state pays the other half.

Contributions towards retiree health benefits also increased by 1.4% to a total 2.8%, which the state also matches. The money is deposited into a special investment account that, like the pension fund, will be utilized to offset the cost of other post-employment benefits (OPEB) including retiree dental care and health care.

The salary increase took effect with the July pay period and the higher contribution rates took effect in arrears, with the August pay warrant. The pension contribution increase expires July 1, 2021, when it will return to the July 1, 2018 rate (8%).

Contracts negotiated by other state employee bargaining units representing engineers, information technology staff, and Highway Patrol officers, and many other job classes, have included similar provisions with significantly higher costs to the employees. But in each instance, the contribution rate increases are intended to protect and preserve defined-benefit pensions and access to affordable health care for state retirees. When YOU invest in your retirement benefits, it becomes that much harder for those who would see the state do away with pensions and retiree health benefits to accomplish that goal.



CAPS in Your Corner: Merit Salary Adjustments

CAPS staff reports a recent uptick in calls and emails from members who have been denied a **Merit Salary Adjustment (MSA)**. With that in mind, here's what you should know about MSAs:

What is an MSA? Typically, a **12-month, one-step** salary increase not to exceed the top-step of the salary range, for an employee meeting their position's required work standards of quality and quantity of experience.

How is a General Salary Increase (GSI) different from an MSA? All Unit 10 rank-and-file employees receive GSIs as provided through CAPS' negotiated MOU. (Supervisors and Managers receive raises at the Administration's direction after CAPS meets and confers on their behalf.)

What is the process for receiving an MSA? **MSAs are not automatic.** A supervisor must submit a Certification of Salary Adjustment form that indicates an employee has met the quality and quantity of experience the position requires to receive the MSA.

What happens when an MSA is denied? If an employee hasn't met the standard to receive the MSA, their supervisor must consult with the appropriate analyst about the denial and supporting documentation. Then the supervisor must notify the employee of the impending denial and provide the evidence for it **at least 10 days before the MSA effective date.**

Is it possible to get reconsideration of a denied MSA? Yes. A supervisor's denial may specify a reconsideration date (no less than three months), if applicable.

If I'm denied an MSA, what should I do? **One of the many benefits of CAPS membership is access to our experienced workplace representatives** who can help you appeal the denial. If you receive notice of a denial to your MSA, an appeal must be submitted fairly quickly, so contact your closest CAPS office as soon as possible.

Any other advice? Yes. Collect any documentation that refutes specific points of evidence cited to deny the MSA. Say that a supervisor noted that you missed a deadline. Perhaps you have an email that shows you turned in the work on time, or that it was someone else's delay that caused the missed deadline and the supervisor was aware. CAPS staff will need a copy of that documentation to assess your case.

Congratulations on Your Retirement, Director Thomas!

CAPS At-Large Director James Thomas has decided to end his thirteen-year career as a dedicated public servant. Director Thomas worked diligently as an Associate Health Physicist at the California Department of Public Health, ensuring the safety of Californians for years. CAPS wishes him a wonderful, restful retirement.

Recruit a New Member, Earn Cash!

Do you have a Unit 10 colleague who isn't a CAPS member? Please urge them to join the only organization in California founded by State Scientists for State Scientists: CAPS!

CAPS now offers a \$50 incentive for recruiting new members, whether they are Rank-and-File, Supervisory or Managerial State Scientists. The online membership application form can be located on the CAPS website at <https://capsscientists.org/application>.

It only takes about two minutes to sign up. Make sure the applicant fills in the "referred by" field to receive your bonus.

How My Professional Growth Led to My Involvement With CAPS

by *Patty Velez, President*

After nearly 34 years as a State Scientist and 25 years as a CAPS member and activist, President Patty Velez is retiring later this year. This month, in the second of a three-part series, President Velez reflects on how her professional growth prompted her to become more deeply involved with CAPS.

In 1991, I was enjoying my career as a State Scientist as the lead Marine Biologist on the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, working not far from where I grew up in Southern California. I had the security of a full-time state job working on a very fulfilling project.

As usual, all the unions, including CAPS, were battling with Governor Pete Wilson. His policies and stinginess on salary and benefits made clear his antipathy for State Scientists and the other 200,000 or so government employees he managed statewide.

Nothing raises passionate questions like turmoil, and I had plenty for one CAPS Board member who happened to work in my office. I was curious about how the union represented us, and I was always asking him for updates on the latest developments. After a while, the Board member suggested that I could learn a lot more if I became a CAPS representative.

So I did.

That decision plunged me into a fascinating world. I learned details about the CAPS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and how it affected the daily working lives of State Scientists. State and Departmental/ Agency budgets, the State Legislative process, and labor law were a few of the many subjects I studied. It became apparent that many decisions made by politicians affected the work of State Scientists. I became more familiar with my colleagues and their career challenges and gained insight into how CAPS' professional staff supported our leaders and members.

In 1995, a Southern California District seat opened on the Board of Directors. My colleague on the Board encouraged me to run. My desire to learn more and be involved led me to run and I won. Then in 1996, I campaigned for the CAPS Board Secretary position and won again.

In late 1996, I moved to Monterey for a Marine Biologist position with the Department of Fish & Game (now Fish & Wildlife). It was, and is, a satisfying job, working on the cleanup of military and Superfund sites, protecting species and their habitats and working on habitat restoration and mitigation projects. Also, as part of the Office of Spill and Prevention Response (OSPR), I have been trained for and have assisted with oil spill response work.

My other full-time job has been as a CAPS Board member. In the past 25 years, I have served as your CAPS District 1 Director, Secretary, Vice President, and President. I have been involved in many long bargaining sessions, attended meetings with legislative representatives, department directors and agency secretaries, appeared at worksite meetings around the state, and listened to and responded to members.

Through these conversations, I understand the frustrations of State Scientists: CAPS has fought against politically-motivated furloughs and has advocated for fair wages. Our pensions seem to be under constant attack. I've thought more than once that CAPS and the State were close to reclassifying Unit 10 jobs and adjusting salaries accordingly. It's still not done.

Still, there have been plenty of accomplishments. CAPS has won several big lawsuits, including a case that banned paying our wages with IOUs. We won a key lawsuit that upheld the principle of like pay for like work. We successfully lobbied for legislative measures that preserved state scientific programs, strengthened environmental protections, and funded new scientific initiatives.

Through it all, I have believed in CAPS. Together, we have a vital mission to advocate for State Scientists' competitive pay, defend our pensions, guard our health benefits, protect our jobs, and provide expert workplace representation. I know that no one else will do it, but together, as a union, we are stronger.

Now, as I prepare to retire and I look back at my time with CAPS, I'm reminded that the mission never ends. It merely is handed off to succeeding generations, just as it was entrusted to me all those years ago.

Next month: President Velez passes along lessons from her 25 years as a CAPS leader.



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CAPS President, Two Members Win CDFW Awards

CAPS President **Patty Velez** (OSPR) and CAPS members **Brianna Seapy** (ECD) and **Jim Starr** (Region 3) have been named **2019 Employee Excellence Award** winners by the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW). Seven State Scientists will receive awards at the upcoming ceremony.

President Velez won CDFW's **Individual Partnership Award**, which goes to employees who "collaborate with, and maintain cooperative and successful relationships" with "external partners" including those in local, state, and federal governments. Seapy received the **Vision Award** for "providing a vision for the future," developing strategies for achieving desired change and effectively communicating it to colleagues. The **Service Award** went to Starr for providing excellent assistance, beyond what his job requires, "that has positively influenced the work environment or the public's perception" of CDFW.

Department **Director Chuck Bonham** and **Chief Deputy Valerie Termini** issued a September 25th email to announce a total of 15 Employee Excellence Awards "for work that exemplifies our Department's core values in the areas of innovation, partnership, vision, organizational enhancement, service, scientific excellence, and leadership."

A ceremony is scheduled for November 14th at 1:30 p.m. in the Resources Building Auditorium in Sacramento. It can be accessed remotely via Skype. **Congratulations, Patty, Brianna, and Jim!**

