

SENATE/HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE:

3/27/13

"My name is Victoria Pratt and I worked as a Senior Investigator for the Bureau of Labor and Industries for 27 years and retired in the spring of 1999. My husband died in 1998 after a long and lingering illness. There were a lot of medical bills and that forced me into near bankruptcy. Every year the legislature was in session, PERS was up for grabs like a gold coated piggy bank, ripe for robbing by the wealthy and the corporations. 1999 was a particularly vicious year. I decided to try Wall Street and invested my investment share of the PERS retirement funds in an institution called International Investors. Well, mighty Wall Street failed in 2000 and all my funds invested with the firm were lost, to the tune of \$1,000 of income per month. Between the OR Legislature and Wall Street - it is like being between the devil and the deep blue sea.

In order to make up the loss, I worked special assignments and did just OK until the bankers broke the economy again in February 2009. Then I was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery and radiation treatment. I could not find work and because of the cost of the cancer treatments, I could not make my house payment and then began the vicious process of trying to obtain a modification from my lender.

I want you all to know that every time we receive a 2% PERS COLA, all of our living expenses go up around 10-15%. Even the way the COLA is figured, it never comes close to covering our increased living expenses. The basics, housing, food, clothing, medical, transportation are never ever covered. Lowering the amount of the COLA will just push us further toward poverty and illness, which will cost the State a whole lot more in the long run.

Right now in my situation, I have been able to just barely keep up. My car went down and I could not afford the repairs and upkeep. I am behind in the cancer payments and the oncologist wants to use another drug which will add additional costs. I qualify for Meals and Wheels, but have no money for food and hence have to use food pantries for to eat. I am now 76 and my doctor has declared me totally disabled because the cancer has spread to my lungs, back and spine. I cannot lift, push, pull and if I should misstep and fall, my spine could be severed and I would be left paralyzed. There is presently no cure for my cancer. I am one who is falling through the cracks, I make just enough to not qualify for much if any State assistance, but not enough to live on. I live in a small unpretentious little house in East Multnomah County and have no assets. For someone like me, who has struggled all my life, worked hard, does not drink or do drugs, does not have wild parties and just grows flowers ... it is a pretty humiliating end of life story.

By not granting a decent cost of living COLA, you would be taking sorely needed money from the most needy after their long service for all of us. Instead of robbing COLA money from PERS retirees, make the wealthy and corporations pay their FAIR share for a change!!!! Thank you for listening to my story."