

AARP Virgin Islands Legislative Issues Survey

A Publication of AARP Knowledge Management | January 2005
Represents the Views of 17,000+ AARP Members



Virgin Islands Legislative Issues Survey: Government Employees Retirement System

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AARP Survey Examines Support for Changes to VI Government Employees Retirement System

AARP surveyed 2,000 randomly selected Virgin Islands AARP members in November and December 2003; 889 members responded. This mail survey shows that majorities support changes to the Virgin Islands Government Employees Retirement System (GERS).

VI Retirees Face Problems Without Changes to Government Employees Retirement System

The territorial government employs nearly one third of the entire work force in the Virgin Islands. Therefore, the challenges facing the GERS impact directly on the economic health of the entire community. The Virgin Islands GERS provides retirement income to thousands of Virgin Islands government employees. Established on October 1, 1959, by Chapter 27,

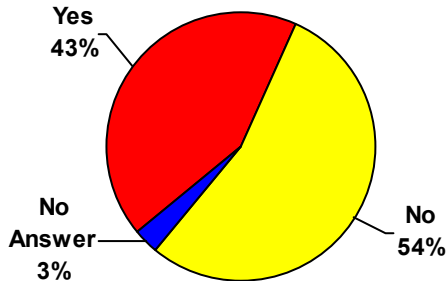
Title 3, Section 715 of the Virgin Islands Code, the GERS administers a defined pension plan for career government employees. More than 5,000 government retirees and 12,000 current government employees who contribute to the system rely on it as the basis for their retirement income. Yet, there is serious concern about the stability of the GERS.

GERS faces insolvency. Created for career employees, the system has expanded to include other classes of employees thereby straining its finances. GERS funds have been used to pay for expenses unrelated to providing retirement benefits to career employees, and for a number of years GERS has been paying out more than it receives in contributions. "Without serious changes to GERS, past and present government employees will not get the future security they deserve," says Denyce Singleton, AARP Director of the Virgin Islands.

AARP Members Employed By VI Government

Two in five AARP members are currently (13%) or previously (28%) employed by the VI Government. Two percent of AARP members have retired from and subsequently became reemployed by the VI Government. Among those covered by any form of health care insurance (83%), 36 percent of AARP members are covered by the VI GERS health care insurance.

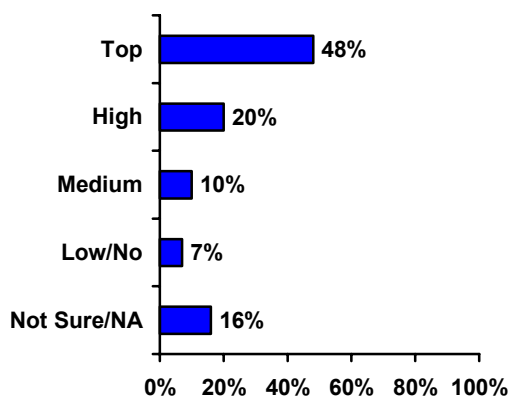
Ever Employed by VI Government n = 889



VI Government Employees Retirement System a Top or High Priority for AARP

Nearly half of AARP members say the GERS should be a top legislative priority for AARP Virgin Islands. Another 30 percent say it should be a high or medium priority.

Legislative Priority to Work on GERS n = 889



AARP members currently and previously employed by the VI government are more than twice as likely (68%) to say that this issue should be a top priority for AARP compared to those who have never worked for the VI government (32%).

AARP Members Strongly Support Major Reforms to VI Government Employees Retirement System

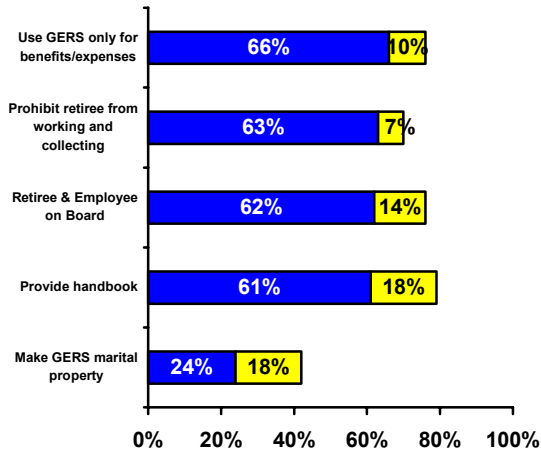
Six in ten AARP members strongly support these changes to the GERS:

- Use the GERS funds only for retirement benefits and necessary administrative expenses
- Prohibit retired government employees from returning to government employment while continuing to collect full retirement benefits
- Have a retiree and current government employee represented on the GERS Board
- Provide an annually updated handbook on GERS benefits and procedures

Just about a quarter of AARP members strongly support changing divorce laws so that pension and benefits provided under the GERS are considered marital property that can be distributed.

Support for Changes to GERS

n = 889



AARP members currently and previously employed by the VI government are more likely than those who have never worked for the VI Government to strongly support

- Having a retiree and current employee on the GERS Board (76% vs. 52%)
- Using the GERS funds only for retirement benefits and administrative expenses (75% vs. 61%)
- Providing a handbook of GERS procedures (74% vs. 52%).

Present and former employees are about as likely as those never employed by the VI government to strongly support prohibiting retired government employees from returning to government employment while continuing to collect full retirement benefits (61% vs. 65%) and changing divorce laws (24% vs. 26%).

Survey Methodology

AARP conducted the Virgin Islands Legislative Issues Survey in November through December 2003. A sample of 2,000 AARP members in the Virgin Islands, proportionally stratified by three age segments—50 to 59, 60 to 74, and 75+, was selected from AARP's membership database. Each sampled member was contacted about the survey in four ways: a pre-notification postcard, the survey itself, a reminder postcard, and a second survey.

Forty-four percent of the sampled Virgin Islands members returned surveys by the cut-off date, providing 889 useable surveys for analysis. Thus, the survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3.4 percent. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would fall in a range of 3.4 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every AARP member in the Virgin Islands age 50 or older had been surveyed. Responses to all GERS and demographic survey questions are attached. The full survey with responses to all questions is available on the AARP website at <http://research.aarp.org> or by contacting Rachelle Cummins, AARP Knowledge Management, (202) 434-6297.

Acknowledgements

AARP staff from the Virgin Islands Office, State Affairs, Knowledge Management, and Office of General Counsel contributed to the design and implementation of the study. Special thanks go to AARP staff including Denyce Singleton, Ed Dale, Clare Hushbeck, Gretchen Straw, David Cicero, Darlene Mathews, Cheryl Barnes, and Michael Schuster.

Annotated Questions

Full survey available at <http://research.aarp.org>.

Sample = 889
Response Rate = 44%
Sampling Error = +/- 3.4%

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. A “*” means less than 1%.

Health Care Questions

3. Are you currently covered through the Virgin Islands Government Employees Retirement System (GERS) health care insurance (base = 739 covered by any health care insurance)

	%
36	Yes
59	No
2	Not sure
3	No response

Pension/Retirement Savings Questions

25. Have you ever been employed by the Virgin Islands Government?

	%
13	Yes, I am currently employed by the VI Government
28	Yes, I was previously employed by the VI Government
2	Yes, I retired from the VI Government, and I am now employed by the VI Government again
54	No, I have never been employed by the VI Government
3	No Response

26. The Virgin Islands Government Employees Retirement System (GERS) is a source of current and future retirement income for more than 5,000 government retirees and 12,000 current government employees. Do you support or oppose the Virgin Islands taking the following steps regarding the Government Employees Retirement System?

a. Use the GERS funds only for retirement benefits and necessary administrative expenses.

	%
66	Strongly support
10	Somewhat support
2	Somewhat oppose
2	Strongly oppose
11	Not sure
8	No response

b. Change divorce laws so that the pension and benefits provided under the GERS are considered marital property that can be distributed.

%
 24 Strongly support
 18 Somewhat support
 10 Somewhat oppose
 13 Strongly oppose
 24 Not sure
 11 No response

c. Provide an annually updated handbook on GERS benefits and procedures.

%
 61 Strongly support
 18 Somewhat support
 1 Somewhat oppose
 1 Strongly oppose
 8 Not sure
 11 No response

d. Prohibit retired government employees from returning to government employment while continuing to collect full retirement benefits.

%
 63 Strongly support
 7 Somewhat support
 6 Somewhat oppose
 10 Strongly oppose
 7 Not sure
 7 No response

e. Have a retiree AND current government employee represented on the GERS Board.

%
 62 Strongly support
 14 Somewhat support
 2 Somewhat oppose
 2 Strongly oppose
 10 Not sure
 9 No response

Legislative Priorities Questions

27. To be effective, AARP Virgin Islands wants to work on the most important issues facing Virgin Islands AARP members. Keeping in mind what's most important to you, how much of a priority should it be for AARP to work on the following legislative issues in the Virgin Islands?

i. Issues concerning the Government Employees Retirement System (GERS)

%
 48 Top priority
 20 High priority
 10 Medium priority
 3 Low priority
 4 Not a priority
 7 Not sure
 9 No response

About Your Questions

The following questions are for classification purposes only, and will be kept entirely confidential.

28. Do you have access to a personal computer at home, at work, or some other place?

<u>%</u>	
58	Yes
37	No
5	No response

28a. If YES: Do you have access to the Internet or the ability to use online services such as America Online (AOL) or VI Access? (base=516 who have access to a computer)

<u>%</u>	
85	Yes
8	No
1	Don't know
6	No response

29. In the last 12 months, have you attended a local AARP Chapter meeting?

<u>%</u>	
7	Yes
89	No
1	Not sure
3	No Response

30. Are you male or female?

<u>%</u>	
37	Male
60	Female
3	No Response

31. What is your age as of your last birthday? _____ (in years)

<u>%</u>	
39	50-59
42	60-74
12	75+
7	No Response

32. What is your current marital status?

<u>%</u>	
54	Married
13	Widowed
19	Divorced
2	Separated
9	Never married
3	No Response

33. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

<u>%</u>	
16	Less than high school
21	High school graduate or equivalent
26	Some college or technical training beyond high school
16	College graduate (4 years)
15	Post-graduate or professional degree
7	No Response

34. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

- %
- 39 Employed or self-employed full-time
- 12 Employed or self-employed part-time
- 38 Retired and not working
- 4 Other such as homemaker
- 3 Unemployed and looking for work
- 4 No Response

35. Are you a native of the Caribbean?

- %
- 65 Yes
- 33 No
- 2 No Response

36. Are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin or descent?

- %
- 9 Yes
- 80 No
- 3 Not sure
- 8 No response

37. What is your race?

- %
- 26 White or Caucasian
- 61 Black or African American
- 2 Asian
- * Native American or Alaskan Native
- 0 Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 8 Other
- 3 No response

38. What is your 5-digit zip code?
(WRITE IN YOUR ZIP CODE.)

39. What was your annual household income before taxes in 2002?

- %
- 10 Less than \$10,000
- 16 \$10,000 to \$19,999
- 16 \$20,000 to \$29,999
- 12 \$30,000 to \$39,999
- 11 \$40,000 to \$49,999
- 13 \$50,000 to \$74,999
- 15 \$75,000 or more
- 7 No response

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