



Survivor Benefits

For members enrolled in the
Defined Benefit Plan



2023|2024

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Survivor benefits are among the most important benefits STRS Ohio provides to its members. Once a member meets certain eligibility requirements, valuable benefits are in place for qualified survivors. These benefits can help to reduce some of the financial uncertainty created by the loss of a loved one.

This brochure describes benefits available to survivors of STRS Ohio members who die *before* retiring and who participated in the Defined Benefit Plan. For information about benefits payable to survivors of members who die *after* retiring, please see the *Service Retirement and Plans of Payment* brochure for members enrolled in the Defined Benefit Plan.

This brochure is a summary written in plain language for use by STRS Ohio members. It is not intended as a substitute for the Ohio Revised Code or the Ohio Administrative Code or for any state or federal law or regulation, nor will its interpretation prevail should a conflict arise between it and any law or regulation. More information may be obtained by contacting STRS Ohio toll-free at 888-227-7877.

Survivor benefits offered under the Defined Benefit Plan

There are three types of monthly benefits available to your qualified survivors. The amount payable to qualified survivors (see Page 3) depends on specific eligibility requirements.

1. Dependent-based benefit

This benefit is payable when a member dies before service retirement. Existing members as of June 30, 2013, must have at least 1.50 years of qualifying service credit* before death. New members on or after July 1, 2013, must have at least 5.00 years of qualifying service credit before death. The benefit is based on the final average salary and number of qualified survivors. For additional details and requirements, see Page 4.

2. Service-based benefit

This benefit is payable when a member with 20 or more years of service credit dies before service retirement. The benefit is based on the final average salary and service credit. For additional details and requirements, see Page 7.

3. Retirement-based benefit

This benefit is payable when a member who is eligible for retirement dies before actually retiring with STRS Ohio and there are no children who are qualified survivors. The benefit is based on the service retirement benefit calculation (age, years of service credit and final average salary) in effect at the time of the member's death. For additional details and requirements, see Page 10.

If a member's death occurs 27 months (for existing members as of June 30, 2013) or 12 months (for new members on or after July 1, 2013) after the member's last contributing service and the member was not receiving a disability benefit, the retirement-based benefit plan is the only plan which allows monthly benefits to be paid to the member's surviving spouse or a designated financially dependent beneficiary.

If a sole qualified survivor is eligible for more than one type of benefit, this survivor may elect which benefit he or she wants to receive.

If there are one or more children who are qualified survivors, the primary beneficiary must select between the dependent-based and the service-based benefit. However, once the children no longer qualify for benefits (due to age or marital status, for example), the primary beneficiary may change to the retirement-based benefit, provided the deceased member was eligible for retirement at death.

In providing estimates, STRS Ohio will assume a qualified survivor wants to receive the benefit providing the highest monthly payment unless directed otherwise.

Qualified survivors

Only qualified survivors are eligible for monthly benefits assuming all other eligibility requirements for monthly benefits are met. Qualified survivors are as follows:

Spouse

For dependent-based or service-based benefits, the spouse of a deceased member is a qualified survivor if the:

- Member had 10 or more years of credit (for dependent-based benefits); *or*
- Spouse cares for the deceased member's qualified children; *or*
- Spouse is at least 62 years old; *or*
- Spouse is mentally or physically incapacitated.

For retirement-based benefits, the spouse of a deceased member is a qualified survivor if the member was eligible for service retirement before the date of death.

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restored withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

Children

Children (including legally adopted children) of a deceased member are qualified survivors if they are:

- Under age 22 and never married; *or*
- Any age, never married, physically or mentally incapacitated before age 22 and have remained continuously incapacitated.

Dependent parent

A parent of a deceased member is a qualified survivor if the parent is at least age 65 and received at least one-half of his or her support from the member during the 12-month period before the member’s death.

Effective date of benefit

For qualified survivors, benefits are effective the first of the month after the date of death unless the application is submitted more than 12 months after the date of death, then benefits are effective the first of the month after the application is received.

Dependent-based benefit

The dependent-based benefit is payable to qualified survivors when the member dies after meeting the following member requirements:

Existing member as of June 30, 2013

- Has 1.50 years of qualifying service credit* before death; and
- Earned a quarter of a year of service credit within the 30-month period preceding death; or was receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing to STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS) at the time of death.
- Provided the account has not been withdrawn, eligibility for dependent-based monthly benefits for

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restored withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

qualified survivors continues for up to 27 months following the member’s last contributing service.

New member on or after July 1, 2013

- Has 5.00 years of qualifying service credit* before death; and
- Date of death is no more than one year from the last date of service; or was receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing to STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS at the time of death.
- Provided the account has not been withdrawn, eligibility for dependent-based monthly benefits for qualified survivors continues for up to 12 months following the member’s last contributing service.

Monthly survivor benefits are determined according to the number of qualified survivors. These benefits are payable as a percentage of final average salary (FAS), which is the average of the member’s five highest fiscal years of earnings, regardless of when they occur.

The percentages are as follows:

Number of Qualified Survivors	Percentage of Final Average Salary
1	25%
2	40%
3	50%
4	55%
5 or more	60%

If contributions were made for less than the FAS period, total compensation is divided by the total number of years of service in the member’s account to calculate the FAS.

The surviving spouse receives 25% of the FAS and the balance of the total survivor benefit is divided equally among the remaining qualified survivors. If there is no surviving spouse, the benefit is divided equally among the qualified survivors.

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restored withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

Termination of dependent-based benefits

Benefits to qualified children terminate upon:

- Marriage;
- Adoption; or
- Age 22.

If a member had less than 10 years service credit, the surviving spouse’s benefits stop until age 62 if there are no qualified children. Once the benefits resume, they are payable for the surviving spouse’s lifetime.

In the following sample estimate, the member has three qualified survivors (spouse and two children).

Dependent-based Benefit Sample Estimate #1	
Deceased member	Age 38
Service credit	10 years
Qualified survivors (spouse and two dependent children)	3
Final average salary	\$45,000
Percentage of final average salary	x 50%
Annual survivor benefit	\$22,500
Monthly benefit	\$1,875

Breakdown of Payment Distribution	
Spouse (25% of \$45,000)	\$937.50/month
Dependent child #1 (12.5% of \$45,000)	\$468.75/month
Dependent child #2 (12.5% of \$45,000)	+ \$468.75/month
Total payments	\$1,875/month

When the oldest child reaches age 22, the benefit is recalculated to provide 40% of FAS to the remaining two dependents:

Sample Estimate #2	
Final average salary	\$45,000
Percentage of final average salary	x 40%
Annual survivor benefit	\$18,000
Monthly benefit	\$1,500

Breakdown of Payment Distribution	
Spouse (25% of \$45,000)	\$937.50/month
Dependent child #1 (15% of \$45,000)	+ \$562.50/month
Total payments	\$1,500/month

When the youngest child reaches age 22, the surviving spouse continues to receive 25% of the FAS for his or her lifetime because the deceased member had at least 10 years of credit.

Sample Estimate #3	
Final average salary	\$45,000
Percentage of final average salary	x 25%
Annual survivor benefit	\$11,250
Monthly benefit to spouse	\$937.50

Service-based benefit

The service-based benefit is payable to qualified survivors when the member dies after meeting the following member requirements:

Existing member as of June 30, 2013

- Has 20 or more years of service credit before death; and
- Earned a quarter of a year of service credit within the 30-month period preceding death; or was receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing to STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS) at the time of death.
- Provided the account has not been withdrawn, eligibility for service-based monthly benefits for qualified survivors continues for up to 27 months following the member’s last contributing service.

New member on or after July 1, 2013

- Has 20 or more years of service credit before death; and
- Date of death is no more than one year from the last date of service; or was receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing to STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS at the time of death.
- Provided the account has not been withdrawn, eligibility for service-based monthly benefits for qualified survivors continues for up to 12 months following the member’s last contributing service.

Monthly survivor benefits are determined according to the number of years of service credit. These benefits are payable as a percentage of final average salary (FAS), which is the average of the member’s five highest fiscal years of earnings, regardless of when they occur.

The percentages are as follows:

Years of Service	Percentage of Final Average Salary
20	29%
21	33%
22	37%
23	41%
24	45%
25	48%
26	51%
27	54%
28	57%
29 or more	60%

Termination of service-based benefits

Benefits to surviving children terminate upon:

- Marriage;
- Adoption; or
- Age 22.

The surviving spouse’s share of the benefit is calculated as follows:

Number of Qualified Survivors	Spouse’s Share
1	100%
2	62.5%
3	50%
4	45.45%
5 or more	41.67%

If there is no surviving spouse and more than one qualified survivor, the benefit is divided equally among the qualified survivors.

In this service-based benefit sample estimate, the member has two qualified survivors (spouse and child under 22 years of age). The benefit is calculated as follows:

Service-based Benefit Sample Estimate #1	
Deceased member	Age 46
Service credit	24 years
Qualified survivors (spouse and one child)	2
Final average salary	\$45,000
Percentage of final average salary	x 45%
Annual benefit	\$20,250
Monthly benefit	\$1,687.50

Breakdown of Payment Distribution	
Spouse (62.5% of \$1,687.50)	\$1,054.69/month
Dependent child (37.5% of \$1,687.50)	+ \$632.81/month
Total payments	\$1,687.50/month

When the qualified child reaches age 22, the surviving spouse receives 45% of the deceased member’s FAS.

Sample Estimate #2	
Final average salary	\$45,000
Percentage of final average salary	x 45%
Annual survivor benefit	\$20,250
Monthly benefit to spouse	\$1,687.50

Retirement-based benefit

The retirement-based benefit is payable when the member dies after qualifying for service retirement (but before actually retiring with STRS Ohio) and there are no children who are qualified survivors.

If there are one or more children who are qualified survivors, the primary beneficiary must select between the dependent-based and the service-based benefit. However, once the children no longer qualify for benefits (due to age or marital status, for example), the primary beneficiary may change to the retirement-based benefit.

Eligibility requirements for service retirement are:

Retirement Dates	Unreduced Benefit (Minimum Age and Years of Service)	Reduced Benefit (Minimum Age and Years of Service)
8/1/2021–7/1/2023	Any age and 34 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 55 and 29 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2023–7/1/2028	Any age and 34 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
On or after 8/1/2028	Any age and 35 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*

There is no time restriction to apply for this benefit; however, some benefits will be lost if the application is received more than 12 months after the date of the member’s death. If a member stops contributing and dies after meeting eligibility, a retirement-based benefit is payable to a qualified survivor.

Qualified survivors

The following individuals are eligible for a retirement-based benefit:

- A surviving spouse.
- A *designated* financially dependent beneficiary. To qualify for benefits, this individual must have received at least one-half of his or her support from the member during the 12-month period before the member’s death. Proof of dependency must be substantiated before benefits are paid.
- A *designated* qualified child who is the member’s sole beneficiary following the termination of dependent-based or service-based survivor benefits.
- A *designated* qualified parent of a deceased member who is at least age 65 and received at least one-half of his or her support from the member during the 12-month period before the member’s death.

*Must have 5.00 years of qualifying service credit, which includes: earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restored withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

Benefit calculation

The retirement-based benefit is determined using the service retirement benefit calculation. The benefit is calculated as if the member had actually retired and provided the maximum joint and survivor benefit to the qualified survivor. This is the Joint and Survivor Annuity option 1 without reversion plan of payment without any guaranteed period. Further information about benefit calculations and plan of payment options is available in the *Service Retirement and Plans of Payment* brochure.

Retirement-based Benefit Sample Estimate	
Deceased member	Age 59
Service credit	32 years
Spouse	Age 57
Final average salary	\$50,000
Percentage of final average salary	<u>x 53.5%</u>
Annual Single Life Annuity	\$26,750
Monthly Single Life Annuity	\$2,229
Percentage of Single Life Annuity* (Joint and Survivor Annuity option 1 without reversion)	<u>x 91.94%</u>
Survivor benefit payment	\$2,049

In this example, if the deceased member also had a child who is a qualified survivor, the retirement-based benefit could not be selected. The primary beneficiary would choose between the dependent-based or service-based benefits. Once the child was no longer eligible for benefits (due to age or marital status, for example), the primary beneficiary could change from either the dependent-based or service-based benefit to the retirement-based benefit.

Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan

A Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan (PLOP) is available to retirement-based survivor benefit recipients. The PLOP allows survivors to take from six to 36 times the member's monthly Single Life Annuity (SLA) benefit in a lump sum. The PLOP must be elected in \$1,000 increments, unless the minimum or maximum amount is selected. Monthly benefits still begin with the benefit effective date and are payable for life, but they are reduced to reflect the amount taken in a lump sum.

If chosen, the one-time PLOP payment will be paid 91 days after the benefit effective date or the date all necessary information is received and the benefit is finalized, whichever is later.

A PLOP payment from STRS Ohio can be processed three ways:

1. All of the PLOP payment paid by direct rollover to an IRA (an individual retirement account or individual retirement annuity) or an employer plan (a tax qualified plan, section 403(b) plan or governmental section 457(b) plan of the Internal Revenue Code) to defer the immediate tax withholding and possible penalty.
2. All of the payment paid through direct deposit to a named financial institution.
3. Some portion paid as a rollover with the remaining amount paid to the survivor.

The PLOP payment will be electronically deposited to the same financial institution listed to receive the monthly benefits, unless the survivor elects to roll over the PLOP payment to a qualified plan.

*The retirement-based benefit is based on actuarial calculations; individual benefit calculations will vary.

Cost of PLOP

The table below shows the amount a monthly benefit is reduced for each \$1,000 of lump-sum payment. For example, a 57-year-old survivor who receives a \$25,000 lump-sum payment, would have his or her benefit reduced \$175.75 a month for life ($\$7.03 \times 25 = \175.75).

PLOP Cost Factor Table			
Age	Reduction per \$1,000	Age	Reduction per \$1,000
53	\$6.78	60	\$7.26
54	6.84	61	7.35
55	6.90	62	7.45
56	6.96	63	7.55
57	7.03	64	7.67
58	7.10	65	7.79
59	7.18		

Taxes on PLOP payments

There are tax implications of receiving a lump sum as well as restrictions on rollovers. Under federal tax laws, lump-sum payments paid directly to the survivor that are eligible for rollover are subject to a mandatory 20% federal tax withholding. PLOP payments are exempt from all state and local taxes in Ohio, including school district income tax.

If a PLOP payment is elected, a 1099-R form will be mailed in January of the year following the PLOP payment or can be accessed online via an Online Personal Account.

Sixty-day rollover option

A PLOP payment paid directly to the survivor may be rolled over to a qualified plan up to 60 days after the PLOP payment is received. All or part of the PLOP payment may be rolled over to an eligible employer plan that accepts rollovers. The rollover will need to be done by the survivor, not STRS Ohio. The portion of the payment rolled over will not be taxed until it is taken out of the qualified plan.

Up to 100% of the eligible rollover distribution (subject to IRS required minimum distribution regulations) may be rolled over, including an amount equal to the 20% of the taxable portion that was withheld for federal tax. If the survivor chooses to roll over 100%, other funds must be found within the 60-day period to contribute to the qualified plan to replace the 20% that was withheld. Conversely, if only 80% of the payment is rolled over, the survivor will be taxed on the 20% that was withheld for federal tax.

Items to consider

Before considering a lump-sum payment, the survivor should estimate how much it will reduce the monthly survivor benefit.

The monthly benefit reduction due to the PLOP is permanent. Future benefit changes, if applicable, will be calculated on the reduced benefit. Survivor benefit recipients should carefully consider the reduced benefit they will receive after taking the lump-sum payment to be sure they can still meet future financial obligations. Remember, the monthly benefit will be further reduced by federal taxes and, if applicable, medical, dental and vision premiums.

Before electing a PLOP, an individual counseling session with an STRS Ohio benefits counselor is strongly recommended.

Taxes on survivor benefits

Monthly survivor benefits are taxable beginning with the first survivor benefit payment. A small percentage of the payment may be tax-free. Contributions that the deceased member made on an after-tax basis to STRS Ohio are prorated over the survivor's lifetime.

There are special tax implications when STRS Ohio accounts are withdrawn in a lump sum. Please review the *Account Withdrawal* brochure.

STRS Ohio will withhold federal taxes from benefits unless otherwise directed. If federal taxes are not withheld, the survivor may be responsible for filing estimated federal tax forms quarterly.

STRS Ohio monthly survivor benefits are exempt from all state and local taxes in Ohio, including school district income tax.

For more information about taxation of STRS Ohio survivor benefits, contact the Internal Revenue Service, the Ohio Department of Taxation or a qualified tax consultant.

Important considerations

Combining STRS Ohio service with OPERS or SERS

Service credit in the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or the School Employees Retirement System (SERS) will be combined with STRS Ohio service credit to determine total years of credit if monthly benefits are elected.

A member cannot earn more than one year of service credit per fiscal year in one, two or all three public systems combined.

Cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)

New STRS Ohio benefit recipients are eligible to receive a COLA beginning on the fifth anniversary of their retirement date. The State Teachers Retirement Board will periodically evaluate whether a cost-of-living increase is payable in accordance with the law in effect at that time (Section 3307.67, Revised

Code). If a COLA is granted, you will receive it on the anniversary of the benefit effective date.

Health care coverage

STRS Ohio offers medical, dental and vision coverage to eligible survivors and their eligible dependents.* Survivors receiving retirement-based benefits qualify for coverage if the member had at least 20 years of service credit on or after Aug. 1, 2023. At least 15 years of service credit is required before Aug. 1, 2023. Service credit requirements do not apply to survivors receiving dependent-based and service-based benefits. Please refer to the Health Care section of our website for eligibility requirements, plan information and monthly premiums. You can also use your Online Personal Account to review your plan options and premiums.

Account withdrawal in lieu of benefits

Eligibility requirements

The primary beneficiary may withdraw the deceased member's account in lieu of receiving monthly benefits if there are no children who are qualified survivors. If there are no qualified survivors and other eligibility requirements are not met, the primary beneficiary must withdraw the deceased member's account. (See Pages 3–4 for further information regarding "Qualified survivors" and Pages 4–5, 7–8 and 10–11 for other eligibility requirements.)

If there is no spouse and only one qualified survivor age 18 or older, the survivor may forfeit rights to benefits and withdraw the account, which includes interest and 50% matching funds, if certain criteria are met (as described under "Withdrawal amount" on Page 18). If the survivor instead takes even one monthly benefit payment and becomes eligible for the balance of the account (for example, reaches age 22), the survivor receives only the member's contributions less any survivor benefits previously paid. No interest or 50% matching funds would be payable.

*The STRS Ohio Health Care Program is not guaranteed. STRS Ohio may change or discontinue all or a part of the program for all or a class of eligible benefit recipients and covered dependents at any time.

Monthly payments vs. account withdrawal

Plan Feature	Monthly Payments	Account Withdrawal
Survivor benefits	Yes	No
Access to health care coverage ¹	Yes	No
Cost-of-living adjustments ²	Yes	No
Direct control over funds	No	Yes
Possible rollover to a qualified plan	No	Yes
Possible tax penalties	No	No
Possible investment costs	No	Yes
Individual investment risk	No	Yes

Withdrawal amount

Account withdrawals consist of the deceased member's contributions plus an additional amount payable under Section 3307.563 of the Revised Code. The additional amount payable depends on years of qualifying service credit* and the rates of interest established by the State Teachers Retirement Board. The interest rates noted below are subject to change without notice. To confirm current interest rates, contact STRS Ohio toll-free at 888-227-7877.

- **With 5.00 or more years of qualifying service credit,*** interest at a current rate of 3% compounded annually will be paid on the member contributions and an additional amount equal to 50% of the sum of the member contributions, plus interest, will also be paid.

¹Members retiring on or after Aug. 1, 2023, must have at least 20 years of service credit to qualify for coverage. At least 15 years of service credit is required for members retiring before Aug. 1, 2023.

²New STRS Ohio benefit recipients are eligible to receive a COLA beginning on the fifth anniversary of their retirement date. The State Teachers Retirement Board will periodically evaluate whether a cost-of-living increase is payable in accordance with the law in effect at that time (Section 3307.67, Revised Code). If a COLA is granted, you will receive it on the anniversary of the benefit effective date.

*When referring to withdrawals, "qualifying service credit" refers to Ohio teaching service, restored withdrawn credit, purchased service for Ohio public teaching from which no STRS Ohio contributions were withheld, and credit obtained for leaves of absence under Section 3307.77 of the Revised Code.

- **With at least 3.00 years but less than 5.00 years of qualifying service credit,*** interest at a current rate of 3% compounded annually will be paid on the member contributions.
- **With less than 3.00 years of qualifying service credit,*** interest at a current rate of 2% compounded annually will be paid on the member contributions.

Interest for all years withdrawn begins to accrue in the fiscal year following deposit. For example, interest on 2022–2023 contributions would begin July 2023 and be payable August 2023 or later. No interest is payable if a member withdraws his or her account in July and contributed to STRS Ohio for only the year just ended. Interest stops accruing the month before account withdrawal.

The decision to withdraw the deceased member's account must be made *before* receiving monthly survivor benefits. If a survivor who is receiving monthly benefits becomes ineligible for survivor benefits (because of age or death, for example), the withdrawal amount, if any, will be limited to the deceased member's contributions less any survivor benefits previously paid. No interest or 50% matching funds would be payable.

If the member had ever received disability retirement benefits, the withdrawal amount does not include interest or 50% matching funds. The account balance is reduced by the benefits received for members who received disability retirement benefits.

Items to consider

The following questions should be answered before deciding whether to withdraw the account or to receive monthly survivor benefits:

- Is the monthly benefit guaranteed for life or will it terminate at a specified date?
- Is access to health care coverage from STRS Ohio available and, if so, will eligible survivors need it?

*When referring to withdrawals, "qualifying service credit" refers to Ohio teaching service, restored withdrawn credit, purchased service for Ohio public teaching from which no STRS Ohio contributions were withheld, and credit obtained for leaves of absence under Section 3307.77 of the Revised Code.

Important tax considerations

If the withdrawal is paid directly to the survivor:

- The payment will be taxed in the year in which it is issued.
- STRS Ohio will withhold federal tax at a rate of 20%.

The withdrawal amount may be rolled over to an eligible retirement account that will accept rollovers and:

- The payment will not be taxed in the current year and no taxes will be withheld.
- The rolled over funds will be taxed when removed from the account to which they were deposited.

If the deceased member was age 73 or older, a certain portion of your payment cannot be rolled over because it is a required minimum payment that must be paid to the survivor. STRS Ohio will advise if this is the case.

There are other tax implications if you withdraw the deceased member's account. Consult a professional tax advisor for more information. STRS Ohio cannot provide tax advice.

Requesting an estimate

A calculator for estimating survivor benefits is available at www.strsoh.org in the Resources section.

An estimate can also be obtained by contacting STRS Ohio toll-free at 888-227-7877 with the following information:

- Your name;
- Social Security number or STRS Ohio account number;
- Current address;
- Names and dates of birth of your beneficiaries;
- The member's date of death; and
- The Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan (PLOP) payment amount you are considering (if applicable).

In providing estimates, STRS Ohio will assume the survivor wants to receive the benefit providing the highest monthly payment unless directed otherwise.

Beneficiaries

Statutory succession of beneficiaries

The statutory succession of beneficiaries outlined below determines who is eligible to receive an account withdrawal or monthly benefits when a member dies, unless the member completed a beneficiary form to designate beneficiaries by name. The statutory succession of beneficiaries is desirable for most family circumstances.

The statutory succession of beneficiaries applies if the member:

- Has not previously filed a valid beneficiary designation form with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS).
- Has not filed a valid beneficiary designation form after any one of the following:
 - Marriage;
 - Birth or adoption of a child;
 - Divorce, marriage dissolution or legal separation;
 - Withdrawal of account; or
 - Permanent STRS Ohio retirement plan selection if a plan change was made.
- Is not survived by a designated beneficiary.
- Designates statutory succession.

Under statutory succession, beneficiaries qualify in the following order:

1. Spouse
2. Qualified children*
3. Nonqualified children (share and share alike)
4. Dependent parent*
5. Parents (share and share alike)
6. Estate

*Defined on Page 4.

Designating beneficiaries by name

If the statutory succession of beneficiaries does not meet your needs, you may designate beneficiaries by name. You may designate or change beneficiaries through your Online Personal Account at www.strsoh.org.

You may designate whom you wish to receive either monthly survivor benefits or a lump-sum payment of the account when you die. Designating a beneficiary by name may jeopardize monthly survivor benefits for otherwise dependent survivors, so you should be cautious about designating a beneficiary who is not a spouse or dependent child or parent.

Regardless of whether a beneficiary is determined by statutory succession or designated by name, all qualified survivors receive monthly dependent-based or service-based benefits if the member had any qualified children.

A beneficiary designated by name who does not meet eligibility for monthly survivor benefits is only eligible to receive a one-time lump-sum refund of the accumulated balance at the time of the member's death. The accumulated account balance includes total contributions and interest and, if the member has at least 5.00 years of service credit, 50% matching funds. If multiple primary beneficiaries are designated by name they will receive only a lump-sum refund of the account, which would be shared equally unless the member submitted a designation form with the retirement system listing specified percentages for each beneficiary.

If you are also a member of either OPERS or SERS, STRS Ohio will pay according to the last beneficiary designation filed with any of the three retirement systems (STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS). Check with SERS and OPERS to determine what designation they will recognize.

STRS Ohio Resources

By phone: **888-227-7877 (toll-free)**

Our dedicated team of member service representatives is available to answer your questions when you need them.

- Call Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

When you need more detailed information, our benefits counselors can provide you with one-on-one consultation in our Columbus office, through a teleconference, videoconference or during field counseling sessions.

On the Internet: **www.strsoh.org**

A quick way to access information is through STRS Ohio's website, where you will find the items below and much more.

- Benefit information (while teaching and in retirement)
- Online Personal Account information
- Videos and on-demand webinars
- Benefits counseling and seminar information
- STRS Ohio publications and forms
- Benefit calculators

By email:

- Go to www.strsoh.org and select "Contact" from the top menu.

Email news service

STRS Ohio updates members about legislation, benefits and other issues affecting the STRS Ohio membership through our email news service — *eUPDATE*. All members with an email on file receive the *eUPDATE*.



Publications available

The following STRS Ohio publications are available on the STRS Ohio website at www.strsoh.org:

- *Account Withdrawal*
- *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report*
- *Death Benefits*
- *Disability Allowance*
- *Disability Retirement*
- *Employment After Retirement*
- *Preparing for Retirement*
- *Purchasing Service Credit*
- *Service Credit Guidelines*
- *Service Retirement and Plans of Payment*
- *Summary Annual Financial Report*
- *Survivor Benefits*
- *Understanding Your STRS Ohio Benefits — Plan Summary*

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