Jan. 30, 2015

SEANC advocating against bill to eliminate payroll deductions
General Assembly begins work in earnest.

After a two-week break to get organized and name committee chairs, the General Assembly session reconvened Wednesday, Jan. 28. And while not much legislating has occurred yet, several bills have been filed – including one by Sen. Ralph Hise (R-Mitchell).

The bill, SB3, would eliminate an employee's right to voluntarily have SEANC (and other employee association) dues conveniently deducted from his or her paycheck each month. Maintaining these payroll deductions is one of SEANC members' top 10 legislative priorities, and our lobbyists and staff will be advocating for employees to maintain that right.

"Everyone has a right to have a voluntary system where the workers choose to have a dues deduction," SEANC Executive Director Dana Cope said. "We will work with lawmakers to ensure employees maintain that right."

In an interview with the News & Observer, SEANC Government Affairs Director Ardis Watkins said, "We fail to see how this accomplishes any public interest." She also noted that the association will be working to defeat the bill.

SEANC staff will be watching closely as more bills are filed and committee meetings begin. At the top of the priority list is a meaningful raise of 5 percent for employees and a cost-of-living adjustment equal to 2.5 percent for retirees.

"This session is already off to a fast start," Cope said. "We are looking forward to working with lawmakers on all of our priorities, but especially our efforts to secure dedicated and hard-working state employees and retirees the crucial and meaningful raises and COLAs they have earned."

SEANC advocating against proposed State Health Plan changes

Higher premiums, the end of the current PPO 70/30 premium-free option, increased wellness surcharges and new wellness activities.

Those were the plan changes for 2016 recommended by State Treasurer Janet Cowell's staff to the State Health Plan Board of Trustees at the board's meeting last week.

After a year with no premium increases in 2015 thanks to the punitive surcharges being paid by members, the staff recommended a number of changes going forward for active employees and non-Medicare retirees.

SEANC lobbyist and health care expert Chuck Stone spoke against those changes, especially the loss of the premium-free option, which is one of SEANC's top 10 legislative priorities.

"The State Health Plan ... continues to shift costs to state employees and does nothing to make dependent care more affordable for state employees' families ...," Stone said after the meeting.

For a video of his remarks to the board, click here.

For detailed information about how the plans could change pending the board's Feb. 11 vote, click here.

Talk to your legislators

This year is the General Assembly's long session. That means lawmakers will be setting a new two-year budget and dealing with a number of items important to state employees. That also means lawmakers are expected to be in Raleigh from now through at least July 1 and likely into August. And that means there is plenty of opportunity for you to come sit down with your state senators and representatives and help them put a face to state employees, SEANC and their constituents.

Not sure who your legislators are? Click here. Curious whether they were endorsed by EMPAC? Click here.

SEANC staff can also help you schedule meetings with your lawmakers and make sure you have the most up-to-date information possible about SEANC's legislative priorities so you can have a good and productive conversation. All you have to do is let us know you're coming. Just email tbooe@seanc.org or call 800-222-2758 or 919-810-0272.

Can't make it to Raleigh? No problem. You can call, write or email your legislators – or even schedule your own time to meet with them in your hometown. Again, you can find your lawmakers and their contact information here.