



## **Benefits and Actuarial Committee (B&A) Meeting**

### **GOTOWEBINAR**

**Wednesday, 9/1/2021**

**1:00 - 3:30 PM ET**

#### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

#### **II. Approve Minutes**

*B&AC Minutes 06.09.2021 - Page 2*

#### **III. Election of Committee Vice Chair**

#### **IV. Action Item: Group Life Insurance**

*RBA\_OptionalLife8x - Page 6*

*Optional Life Ins - BA review\_8-30-final - Page 8*

#### **V. Information Items**

- **Review Stress Test and Sensitivity Analysis Report**

*Stress Test & Sensitivity Analysis Sept 2021 - Page 15*

*VRS Stress Test Report 2020 Draft 8.30.21 - Page 37*

- **Upcoming B&A Committee Meetings**

- October 13, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

- November 15, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

- **2022 B&A Committee Schedule**

- February 9 at 1:00 p.m.

- June 6 at 1:00 p.m.

- October 17 at 1:00 p.m.

- November 14 at 1:00 p.m.

#### **VI. Other Business**

## Minutes

An electronic meeting of the Virginia Retirement System Benefits and Actuarial Committee was held on June 9, 2021 in accordance with § 2.2-3708.2(A)(3) of the *Code of Virginia* and in accordance with guidance provided in Item 4-0.01 of Chapter 552 of the 2021 Special Session I Acts of Assembly, with the following members participating:

William A. Garrett, Vice Chair  
Michael P. Disharoon

Board members present:  
O’Kelly E. McWilliams, III, Board Chair  
Joseph W. Montgomery, Board Vice Chair  
Hon. J. Brandon Bell, II  
John M. Bennett  
Troilen G. Seward

VRS Staff:  
Patricia Bishop, Jennifer Schreck, Rory Badura, Judy Bolt, Jeanne Chenault, Michael Cooper, Sara Denson, Valerie Disanto, Jonathan Farmer, Brian Goodman, Robert Irving, Angela Payne, Jillian Sherman, and Cindy Wilkinson.

Guests:  
Adam Rosatelli, Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee; Latosha Johnson, Department of Planning and Budget; and Bea Snidow, Virginia Education Association.

The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m.

### Opening Remarks

Mr. Garrett called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the June 9, 2021 meeting of the Benefits and Actuarial Committee.

Mr. Garrett took a moment to express appreciation and gratitude to Wallace “Bo” Harris, whose term recently expired, for his leadership of the Benefits and Actuarial Committee.

Next, Mr. Garrett noted that given the current circumstances related to COVID-19, the Committee is unable to meet in person and, therefore, is using electronic means to hold the meeting. The meeting is being held in accordance with § 2.2-3708(A)(3) of the *Code of Virginia* and Chapter 552 of the 2021 Special Session I Acts of Assembly as they relate to conducting business during the pandemic.

Mr. Garrett then took attendance with the following roll call vote:

Mr. Bell: Here  
Mr. Bennett: Here  
Mr. Disharoon: Here  
Mr. McWilliams: Here

Mr. Montgomery: Here  
Ms. Seward: Here  
Mr. Garrett: Here

#### **Public Comment**

In accordance with Chapter 552 of the 2021 Special Session I Acts of Assembly, the Committee opened the floor for public comment. Mr. Garrett noted that no members of the public registered to comment at the electronic meeting.

#### **Approve Minutes**

Upon Mr. Montgomery's motion, with a second by Mr. Bennett, the Committee approved the minutes of its April 19, 2021 meeting upon the following roll call vote:

Mr. Bell: Aye  
Mr. Bennett: Aye  
Mr. Disharoon: Aye  
Mr. McWilliams: Aye  
Mr. Montgomery: Aye  
Ms. Seward: Aye  
Mr. Garrett: Aye

#### **Purchase of Prior Service Normal Cost Rates**

Rory Badura, Senior Staff Actuary, presented the proposed normal cost rates for the purchase of prior service for Plan 1, Plan 2 and Hybrid Plan members. Mr. Badura explained that members are eligible to purchase prior service at any point while employed as an active VRS member; however, there is a two-year period of time to purchase most types of service at approximate normal cost rates before the cost changes to an actuarial equivalent cost. The approximate normal cost rates are updated every four years following the Board's acceptance of the new assumptions associated with the quadrennial experience study. The actuarial equivalent cost rates are developed by Cavanaugh Macdonald Consulting, LLC, the Plan Actuary, and are based on the new assumptions and demographic data from the prior year valuations.

The following are the proposed normal cost rates for current active members across each of the plans and their respective member groups:

- Plan 1: 12.54% for regular VRS members, 21.64% for Hazardous Duty employees and 35.03% for judges.
- Plan 2: 10.89% for regular VRS members, 19.97% for Hazardous Duty employees and 33.13% for judges.
- Hybrid Plan: 6.68% for regular VRS members and 18.12% for judges.
- Alternate Hazardous Duty: 9.20% for certain hazardous duty employees whose employers have not adopted all enhanced benefits for their hazardous duty employees.

Following some discussion, the Committee took up the following RBA for consideration:

**RBA: Approve Updated Rates for Purchase of Prior Service for Plan 1, Plan 2 and Hybrid Plan Members, Effective July 1, 2021.**

**Request for Board Action:** *The Board determines, after considering the recommendations of the Plan Actuary, that effective July 1, 2021, the rates for Plan 1 members to purchase prior service shall be 12.54% for regular VRS members, 21.64% for hazardous duty employees, and 35.03% for judges; that the rates for Plan 2 members to purchase prior service shall be 10.89% for regular VRS members, 19.97% for hazardous duty employees, and 33.13% for judges; that the rates for Hybrid Plan members to purchase prior service shall be 6.68% for regular VRS members, and 18.12% for judges, and an alternative rate of 9.20% for certain affected hazardous duty employees whose employers have not adopted all the enhanced benefits for their hazardous duty employees.*

Upon a motion by Mr. Montgomery, with a second by Mr. Bennett, the Committee recommended approval of the action to the full Board of Trustees upon the following roll call vote\*:

Mr. Bell: Aye  
Mr. Bennett: Aye  
Mr. Disharoon: Aye  
Mr. McWilliams: Aye  
Mr. Montgomery: Aye  
Mr. Garrett: Aye

*\*Due to technical difficulties, Ms. Seward was unable to audibly respond during this vote.*

**Information Item**

Upcoming B&A Meetings

Mr. Garrett reviewed the B&A Committee's upcoming meetings:

- September (TBD)
- October 13, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.
- November 15, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Garrett advised that following the conclusion of the June 10, 2021 Board meeting, the Committee members will be polled for their availability in order to schedule a September meeting to receive the Stress Test and Sensitivity Analysis Report.

**Adjournment**

Upon a motion by Mr. Montgomery, with a second by Mr. Bennett, the Committee agreed to adjourn the meeting upon the following roll call vote\*:

Mr. Bell: Aye  
Mr. Bennett: Aye

Mr. Disharoon: Aye  
Mr. McWilliams: Aye  
Mr. Montgomery: Aye  
Mr. Garrett: Aye

*\*Due to technical difficulties, Ms. Seward was unable to audibly respond during this vote.*

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 1:31 p.m.

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Date

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William A. Garrett, Vice Chair  
Benefits and Actuarial Committee



**Approve increasing optional insurance maximum coverage from up to four times annual salary to eight times annual salary (subject to an unchanged maximum dollar amount limit of coverage).**

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**Requested Action**

After considering the recommendations of its group life insurance third-party administrator, the Board approves increasing optional insurance maximum coverage from four times annual salary to eight times annual salary (subject to an unchanged maximum dollar amount limit of coverage).

**Description/Background**

Prior to 1995, VRS was authorized, but not required, to offer optional life, accidental death, and dismemberment insurance in amounts equal to twice the insured employee's salary. From 1995 to 2001, *Code of Virginia* § 51.1-512 specified that optional life, accidental death, and dismemberment insurance must be made available to active employees in incremental amounts up to four times the employee's annual salary. In 2001 the reference to "incremental amounts up to four times the employee's annual salary" was replaced by a fixed dollar amount, and in 2010 the fixed dollar amount was changed to "a maximum amount determined by the Board." Limited optional coverage, not including accidental death and dismemberment, may be carried into retirement with lower maximum coverage amounts, and all optional insurance coverage ends when the retiree attains the age of 80. The maximum amounts are reviewed at least once every five years by the Board's actuary and increased by the Board upon the recommendation of the actuary.

Effective July 1, 2019, the maximum optional life, accidental death, and dismemberment insurance coverage for active insured employees is \$800,000, and the maximum optional life insurance coverage for active retirees is \$300,000.

Throughout the period from 2001 to the present, optional life, accidental death, and dismemberment insurance has been offered in increments of one-, two-, three-, or four-times annual salary, subject to a maximum dollar amount. This RBA would expand the number of optional insurance amounts available for election from four to eight (i.e., increments of one to eight times annual salary), still subject to the maximum dollar amount as determined by the Board from time to time.

Effective date. Although the RBA is being approved now, VRS staff has requested a delayed effective date to allow planned online functionality to be in place prior to allowing Securian to increase the maximum optional life benefits multiplier from four to eight. The planned system modifications will allow online submission of VRS Group Life Insurance program forms, including those for optional coverage. Staff will inform the Board of the effective date of the change contemplated by this RBA at a subsequent Board meeting.

**Rationale for Requested Action**

Securian is the third-party administrator for the VRS Group Life Insurance program and, after its analysis of experience in the VRS Group Life Insurance program, has recommended this enhancement to the optional benefits to provide additional flexibility to eligible employees when planning and structuring their financial resources. Securian’s recommendation complies with the relevant section in the *Code of Virginia* since all elections of optional coverage are subject to the maximum dollar amount determined by the Board. This change will benefit members with lower incomes by allowing them to purchase higher amounts of optional insurance.

**Authority for Requested Action**

*Code of Virginia* § 51.1-512(A) provides in part, “The Board shall, under the terms and conditions specified by the Board, make available to each active insured employee optional life, accidental death, and dismemberment insurance in incremental additional amounts not to exceed a maximum amount determined by the Board. Such maximum shall be reviewed at least once every five calendar years by the actuary of the Virginia Retirement System and increased by the Board upon the recommendation of the actuary.”

The above action is approved.

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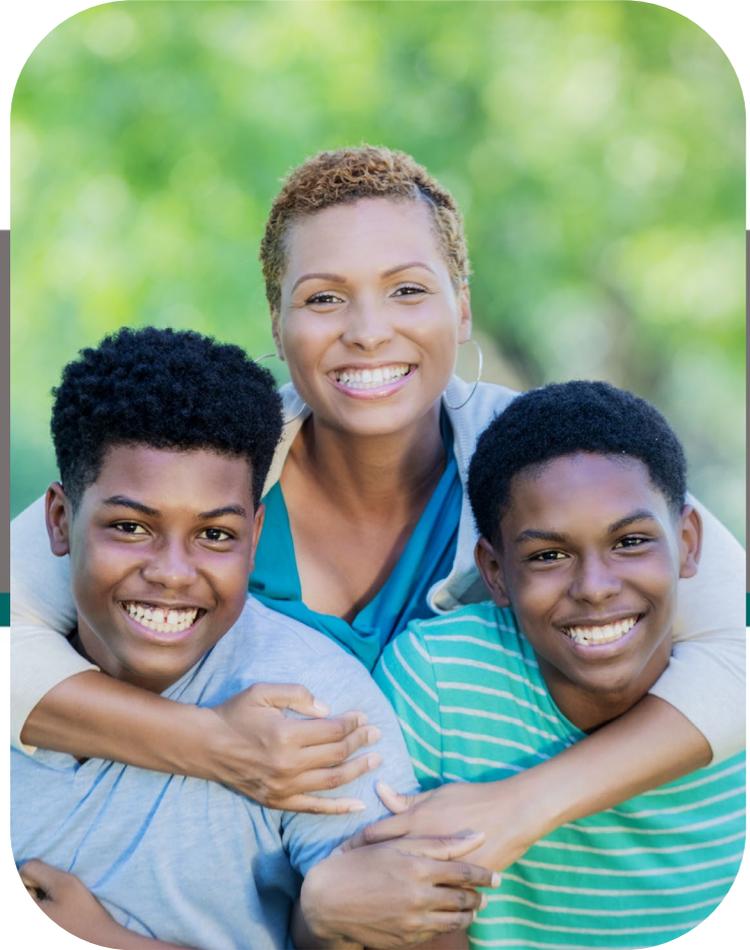
O’Kelly E. McWilliams, III, Chair  
VRS Board of Trustees

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Date

# Optional Life Insurance

Presentation to the Benefits and Actuarial  
Committee  
September 1, 2021





**Recommended Plan Design Changes**



**Online Portal Registration**



**Request for Board Action (RBA)**

## Recommendation to increase the levels of coverage available for Optional Life

- Active employees currently have the option to purchase one to four times (1-4x) creditable compensation.
- The recommendation is to increase to allow a purchase of up to 8x the creditable compensation.
- The guaranteed issue maximum of 4x cred comp or \$400,000 will remain the same.
- The coverage maximum of \$800,000 will remain the same.

## One-Time Enhanced Enrollment Opportunity & Online Enrollment

- Securian has proposed a one-time opportunity for members to increase their coverage without underwriting, subject to maximum amounts.
- The enhanced enrollment opportunity will allow current employees with existing coverage to increase by 1x cred comp not to exceed the guaranteed issue limit.
- Current employees without coverage can elect 1x cred comp not to exceed the guaranteed issue limit.
- Increases beyond 1x cred comp will be subject to underwriting/medical review.

## Online Enrollment

- VRS and Securian are partnering to allow members online access to apply for optional life coverage by accessing a link within myVRS (CY2021).
- The on-line application functionality will mesh with myVRS online capabilities and make the application process easier than the current paper application that involves the Employer, VRS and Securian.

## RBA Review

- Requesting approval now of the increase to 8x creditable compensation and the one-time guaranteed issue opportunity.
- There will be a delayed effective date to allow for the implementation of the on-line application process.

# Optional Life Insurance: Key Takeaways

- Changing from 4x to 8x cred comp will offer **additional coverage options**, and may also **increase the opportunity for employees with lower salaries** who may not have considered optional life before.
- **One-time enhanced enrollment window** is guaranteed issue subject to maximum, with no underwriting.
- **Coverage maximum** of \$800,000 remains the same as today.
- **Online application** improves access and eases administration associated with the current paper process.
- **RBA approval now**, with **delayed implementation** until online process is up and running (CY2021).

## Request for Board Action

- Full RBA is provided in your documentation for review.
- Requested Action

*After considering the recommendations of its group life insurance third-party administrator, the Board approves increasing optional insurance maximum coverage from four times annual salary to eight times annual salary (subject to an unchanged maximum dollar amount limit of coverage).*

# VRS Stress Test and Sensitivity Analysis

Report Summary

September 2021



# Stress Testing and Sensitivity Analysis Mandate



- Section 51.1-124.30:1 of the *Code of Virginia* requires VRS to formally adopt a policy to regularly report sensitivity and stress testing analyses for members of the General Assembly.
- The analyses should include projections of benefit levels, pension costs, liabilities and debt reduction under various economic and investment scenarios.
- This report provides an analysis of the potential impact of various scenarios and hypothetical situations on VRS-administered retirement plans and supports transparency for the future health of the retirement system.\*

\* Report content and summary slides are subject to further editorial and content review.

# VRS Stress Test and Sensitivity Analysis

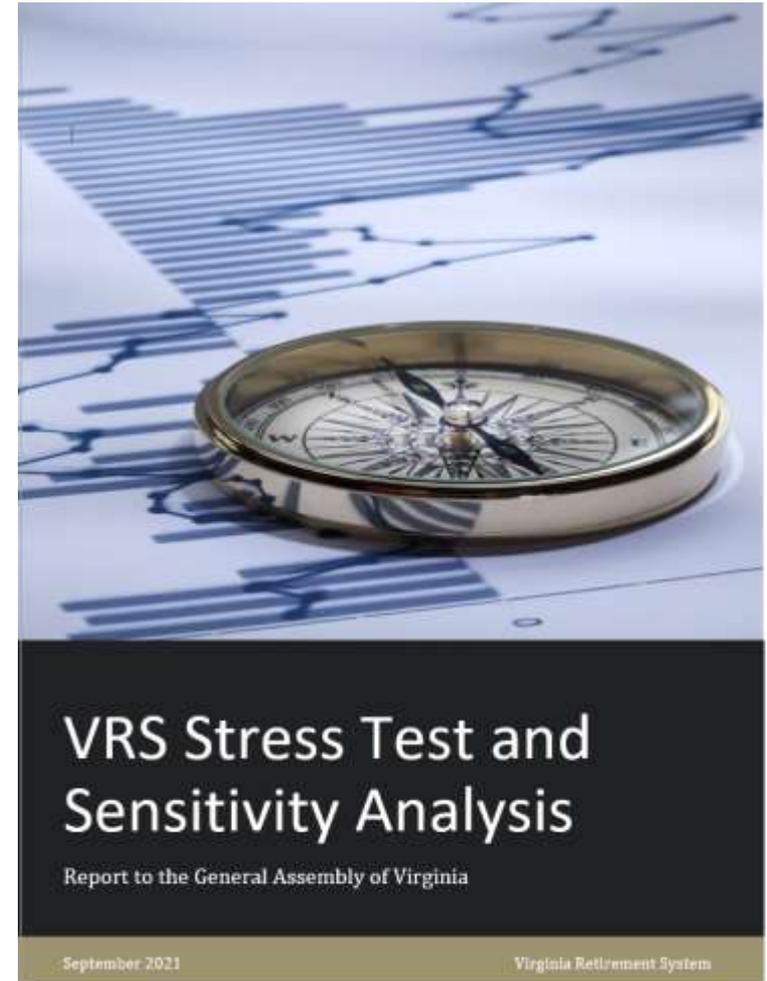
Based on June 30, 2020 Actuarial Valuation

This report is based on the June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation.

- Projections also include assumption changes that were approved for the 2021 actuarial rate setting valuations.

This report focuses on:

- The ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and resulting forward-looking expectations after robust investment returns for fiscal year 2021.
- Risks to long-term funding, including:
  - Investment volatility
  - Contribution risk
  - Longevity



- While economic markets rebounded to provide strong returns for fiscal year 2021, COVID-19 continues to create uncertainty in global markets and unpredictable impacts to future market returns.
- Changes to assumptions recommended following the 2021 quadrennial experience study, including changing to a generational mortality approach on a benefits-weighted basis, will better position the plan to address longevity risk associated with members living longer in retirement.
- As plans mature and assets continue to grow, downside investment risk will have a bigger impact on plan funded status and employer contribution rates.

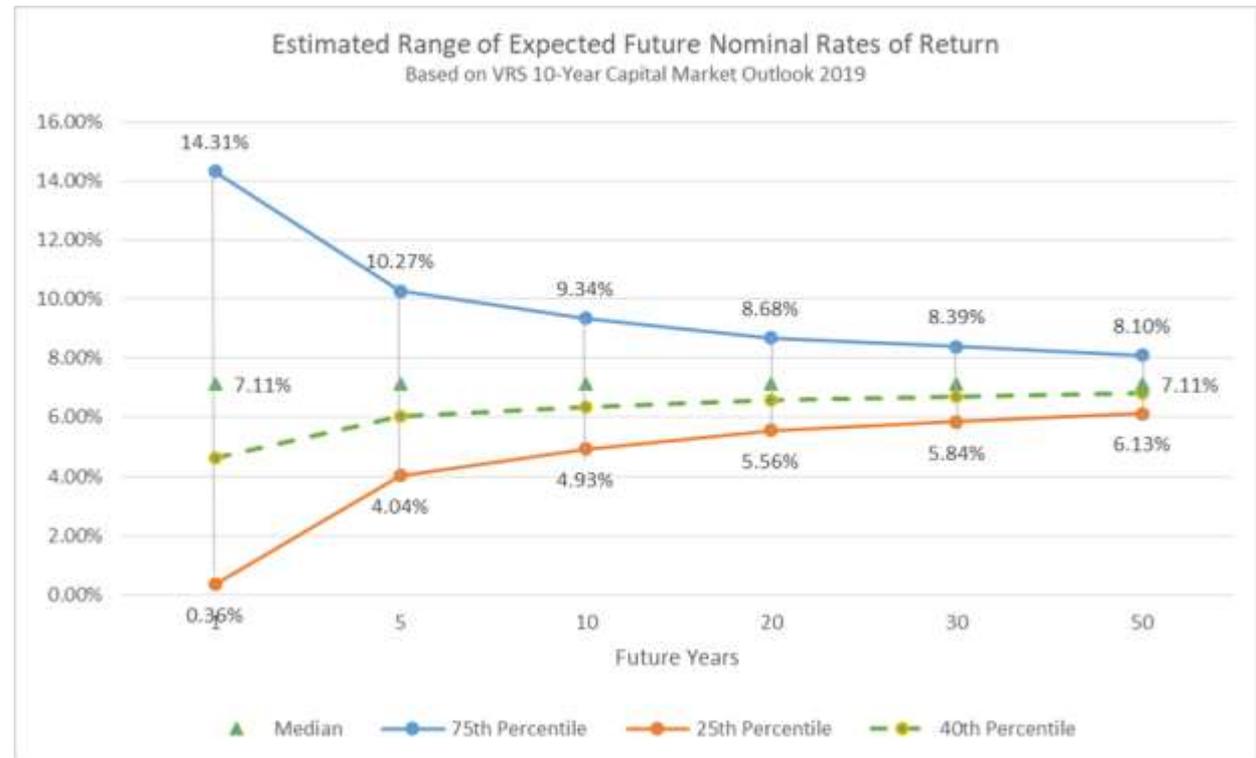
- Significant resources must remain dedicated to addressing the amortization of the legacy unfunded liabilities.
- Analysis suggests that accelerating the payback of the legacy unfunded liabilities could provide significant long-term savings and better position the statewide plans to weather future volatility in investment returns, serving to reduce investment risk.

# Future Risk Analysis

## Investment Rate of Return

The discount rate reflects expectations of what the markets will deliver in the future and is calculated based on two components:

- Expected price inflation; and
- Real Rate of Return.



Due to the divergence between expected returns over the near term, i.e., the next five to 10 years, and over the longer term, i.e., 20 to 30 years, the Board selected a blended discount rate of 6.75%, below the median expected long-term rate of 7.11%.

# Future Risk Analysis

## Sensitivity Analysis



- Analysis of discount rate sensitivity on employer contribution rates gives a sense of the long-term risk to the employer contribution rates and changes to the funded status.
- The analysis provides the impact on employer contribution rates assuming discount rates that are up to two percentage points above or below the current valuation discount rate.

### State Plan

(\$Thousands)

Discount Rate	Current				
	8.75%	7.75%	6.75%	5.75%	4.75%
Total Normal Cost Rate	6.58%	7.84%	9.55%	11.92%	15.23%
Member Contribution Rate	4.57%	4.57%	4.57%	4.57%	4.57%
Employer Normal Cost Rate	2.01%	3.27%	4.98%	7.35%	10.66%
Administrative Expense Load	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%
Total Employer Normal Cost Rate	2.30%	3.56%	5.27%	7.64%	10.95%
Total Amortization Rate	2.15%	5.63%	9.19%	12.85%	16.60%
Defined Contribution Hybrid Plan	0.99%	0.99%	0.99%	0.99%	0.99%
Total Employer Rate	5.44%	10.18%	15.45%	21.48%	28.54%
Change in Employer Rate	(10.01)%	(5.27)%	0.00%	6.03%	13.09%
Estimated Change in Annual Funding	(443,292)	(233,382)		267,038	579,690
Unfunded Liability	1,951,855	4,163,206	6,791,187	9,927,861	13,682,196
Funded Status	90.8%	82.3%	74.0%	66.1%	58.6%

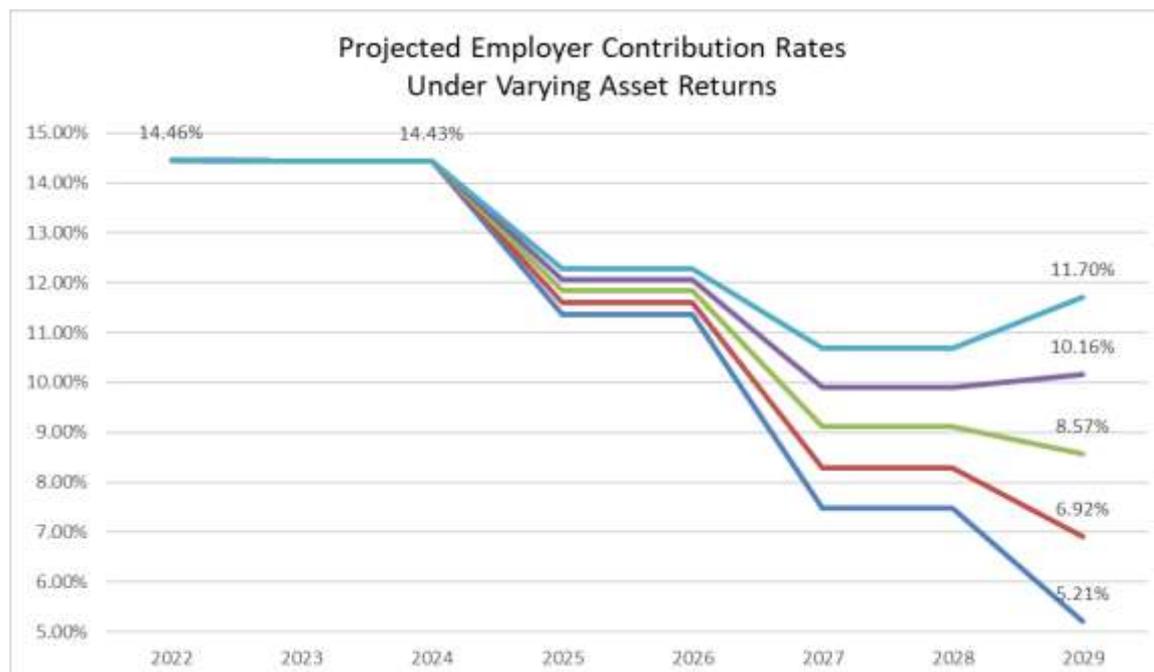
# Future Risk Analysis

## Possible Future Outcomes – Deterministic



- Investment returns will have a greater impact on the funding of the plans as VRS plans continue to mature.
- The exhibit below provides a range of expected employer contribution rates under varying rates of return from 4.75% - 8.75% over the next five years for the State plan.
- For example, if the fund returns 5.75% in each of the next five years, the contribution rate would be expected to decrease to 10.16% by 2029.

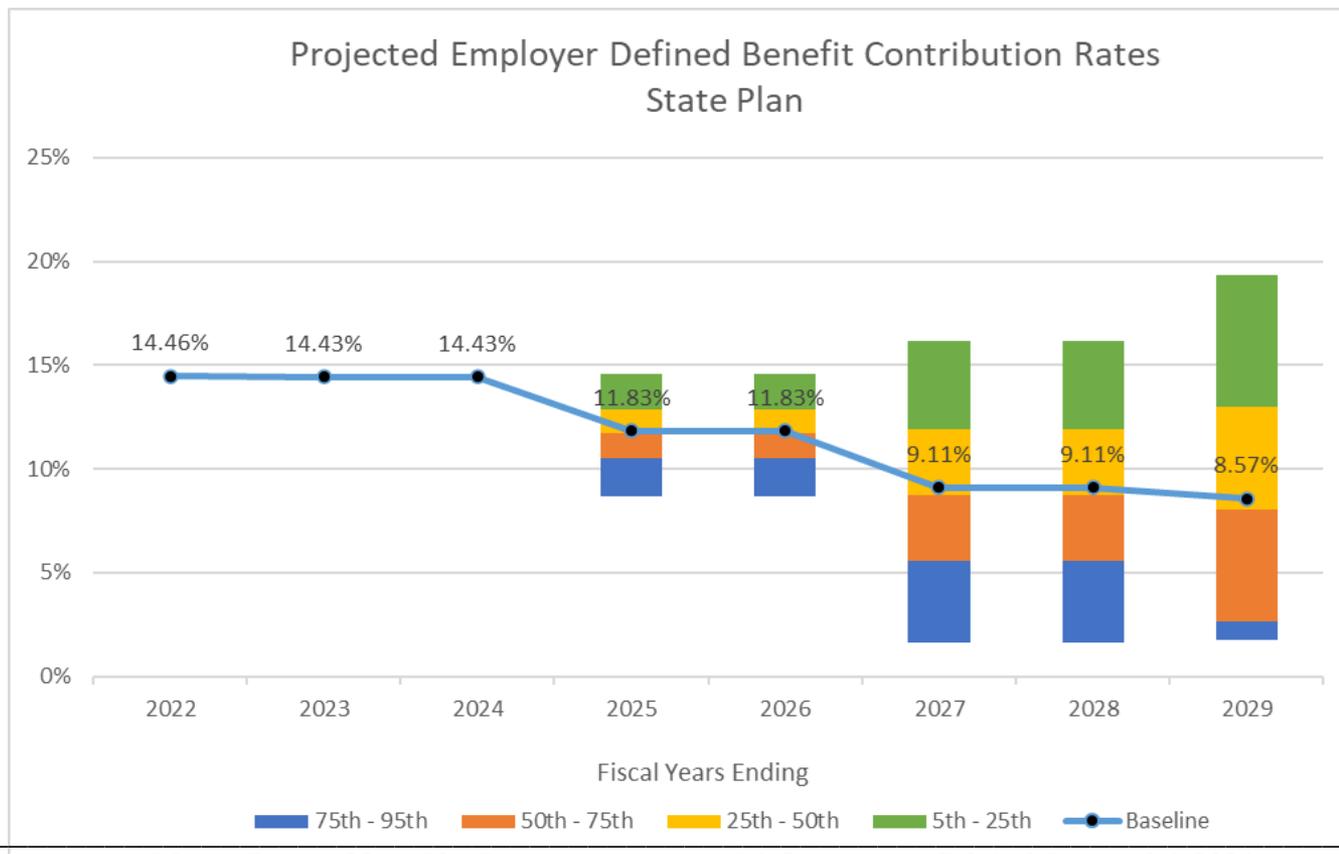
### State Plan



# Future Risk Analysis

## Possible Future Outcomes - Stochastic

- Stochastic outlook provides a range of possible returns based on 10,000 scenarios.
- There is a 50% probability that employer rates will be between 2.7% and 13.0% by FY 2029 with an expected employer rate of 8.57%.



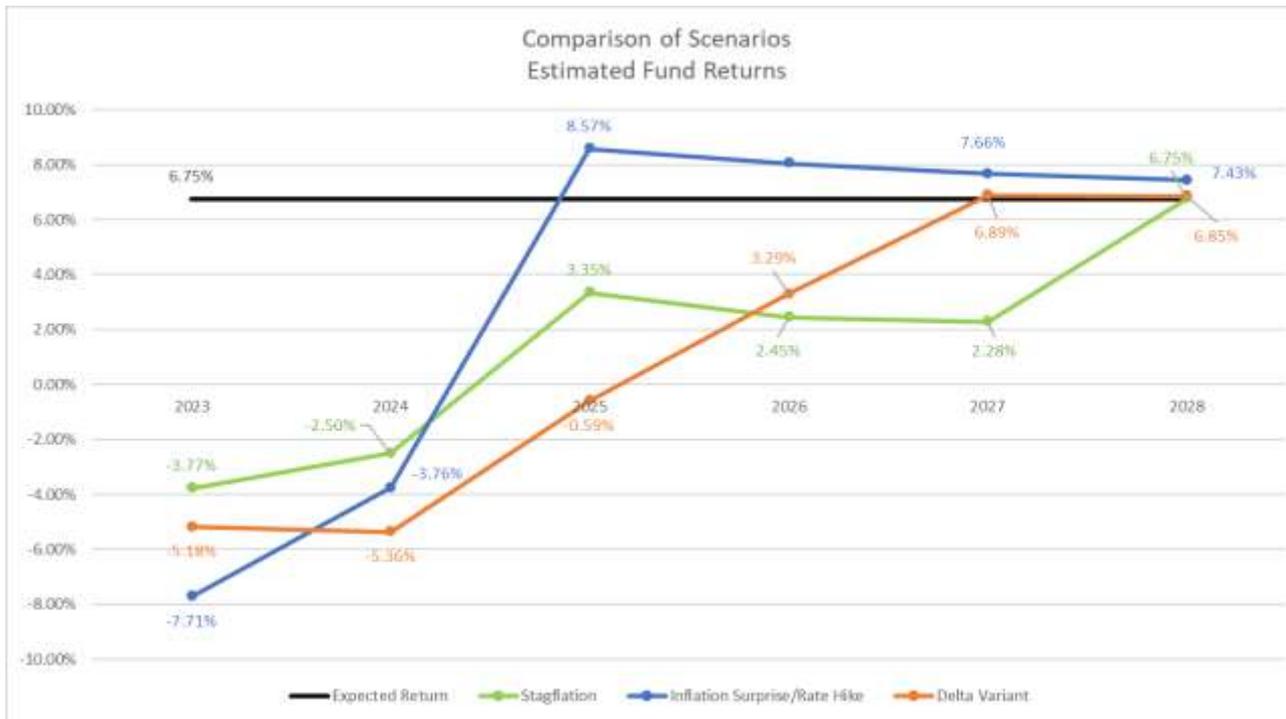
- Fiscal year 2021 saw a major rebound in markets following the disruption in fiscal year 2020 due to COVID-19.
- Concern of higher inflation:
  - The stronger-than-expected rebound in global growth.
  - Extraordinary monetary and fiscal stimulus.
  - Jump in demand for goods and services as economies reopened.
- Questions remain surrounding the pace and effectiveness of vaccinations, the possibility of additional virus variants, and the uncertainty this may cause to financial markets.

- Unprecedented events make it difficult to precisely model projections or predictions.
- To assist in illustrating plausible impacts to the fund, the VRS investment team compiled several economic scenarios that provide a framing of possible global economic responses over the next several years.
- The following three illustrative scenarios are estimates of possible recovery scenarios designed to show the magnitude of impacts on plan funding.

# Future Risk Analysis

## COVID-19 Economic Recovery Scenarios

- Estimates of illustrative scenarios show the magnitude of impacts on plan funding.
- There is no degree of certainty that any of these three scenarios will correctly simulate what will happen over the next five years.



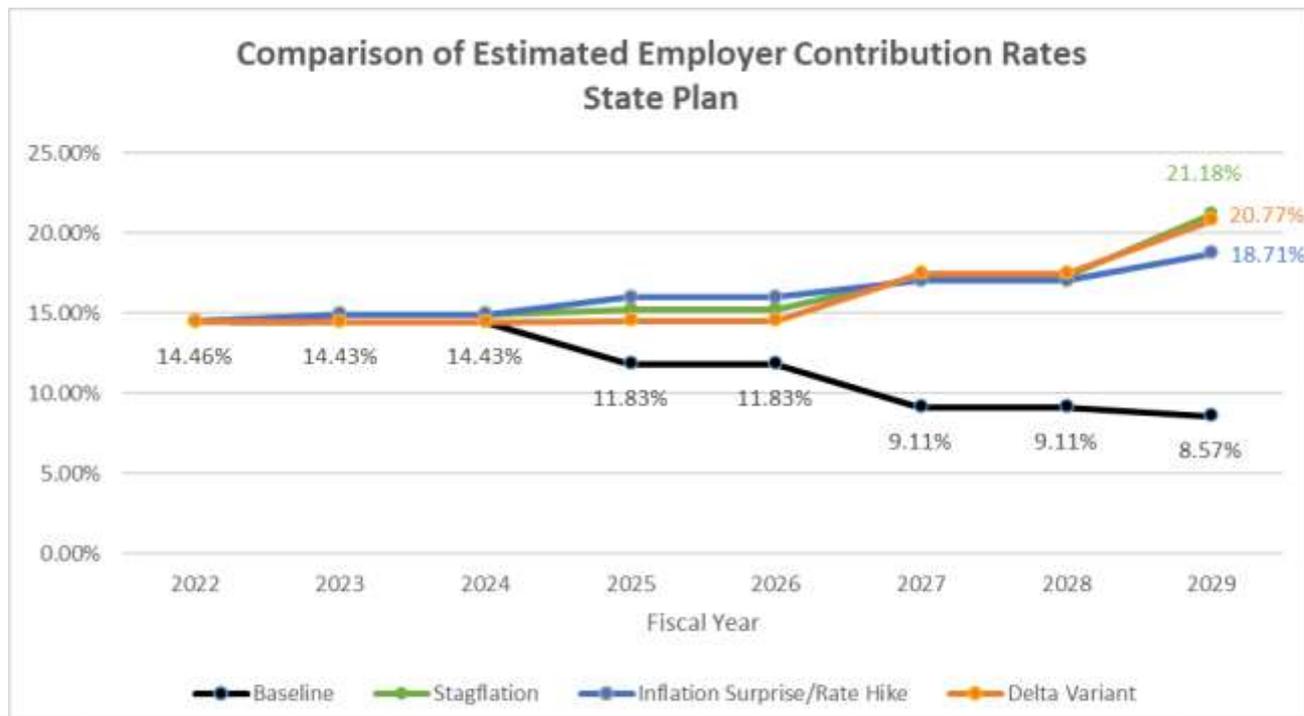
### Estimated Cumulative Return over next six years

Stagflation: 1.36%  
 Inflation Surprise: 3.16%  
 Delta Variant: 0.85%

# Future Risk Analysis

## Illustrative Economic Scenarios

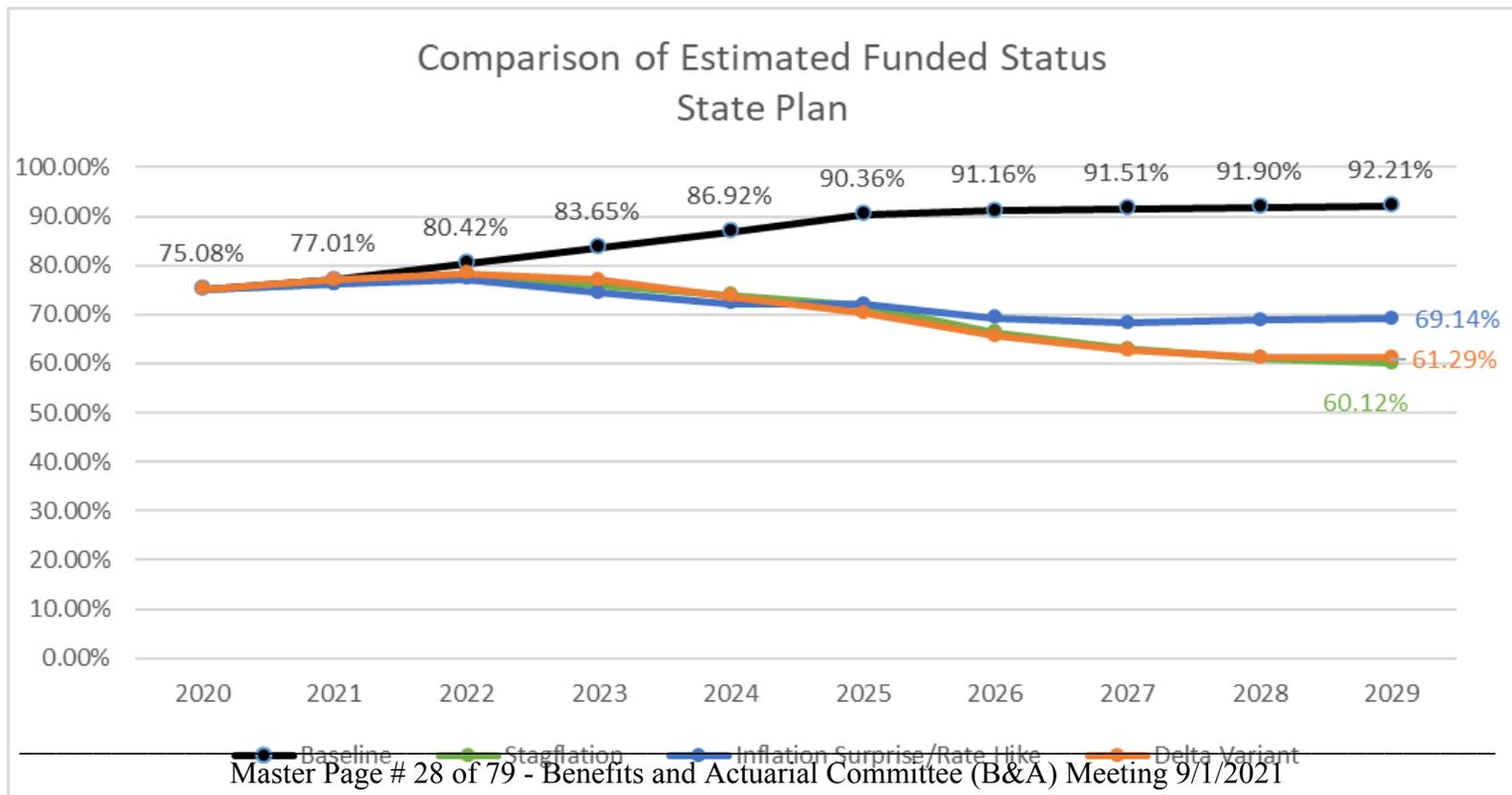
- Each of the scenarios modeled suggest contribution rates will increase in the future due to investment losses.
- Stagflation and Inflation Surprise also factor in losses due to cost-of-living increases exceeding the assumed inflation rate of 2.5%.
- Full impact of increases are not immediate due to actuarial smoothing.



# Future Risk Analysis

## Illustrative Economic Scenarios

- Funded status is also expected to decline due to lower than expected returns simulated in the illustrative economic scenarios.
- The magnitude of the drop is impacted by the duration of returns below the assumed rate of return.



# Future Risk Analysis

## Liquidity to Assets Ratio

- A liquidity-to-assets ratio can be useful in determining the liquidity risk, if any, of a pension plan.

$$\text{Liquidity to Assets Ratio} = \frac{\text{Cash} + \text{Contributions} - \text{Benefit Payments \& Expenses}}{\text{Market Value of Assets}}$$

- A negative liquidity-to-assets ratio indicates the pension plan requires additional money to maintain operations and make all benefit payments.
- In a typical year, cash flows may be supplemented by realizing positive investment returns.



- Contribution risk is the possibility that actual future contributions deviate from what was expected.
- Following the Global Financial Crisis, rating agencies and other oversight and regulatory bodies placed increased emphasis on the payment of actuarially determined required contributions.
  - For the statewide plans, the Governor and General Assembly not only committed in statute to funding the actuarially determined employer contribution rates, but also accelerated their statutory plan.
  - Political subdivision plans, with very few limited exceptions, are required to fund the actuarially determined contributions.
- While economic shocks can be smoothed into the employer contribution rates to manage volatility, budget impacts from the pandemic may continue for several years. The reduced revenue that the State and local employers could face may be a contributing factor to the risk of underfunding.

- Longevity risk is a term used to describe the instance in which life expectancies are longer than what was assumed.
- In defined benefit plans, longevity risk is the risk that members live for longer than is currently expected. This can result in pensions being paid longer than expected, costing plans more money.
- Following the 2021 quadrennial experience study the VRS Board moved from a static table based on Society of Actuaries RP-2014 mortality table adjusted for margin and based on a headcount-weighted basis to a Society of Actuaries public sector mortality table PUB-2010 using a generational mortality approach and a benefits-weighted basis.

# Future Risk Analysis

## Mortality/Longevity Risk



Incorporating generational mortality into VRS assumptions increased total liabilities of all pension plans approximately 2.8%, or \$2.95 billion.

**Entry Age Accrued Liability ( \$'s Billions)**

Plan	2020 Valuation RP-2014 Static Mortality Table	Switch to Pub2010 Mortality Table with Modified MP- 2020 Amt Wtd	Percentage Increase in Accrued Liability	Dollar Increase in Accrued Liability
State	\$25.75	\$26.40	2.51%	\$0.65
Teachers	\$50.84	\$51.80	1.90%	\$0.96
SPORS	\$1.21	\$1.25	3.90%	\$0.05
VaLORS	\$2.26	\$2.33	3.14%	\$0.07
JRS	\$0.68	\$0.75	10.18%	\$0.07
Political Subdivisions in Aggregate	\$25.31	\$26.46	4.55%	\$1.15
<b>Total Pension Liabilities</b>	<b>\$106.04</b>	<b>\$108.99</b>	<b>2.78%</b>	<b>\$2.95</b>

# Future Risk Analysis

## Mortality/Longevity Risk



The exhibits below highlight the assumed increase in life expectancy associated with the new mortality tables adopted by the VRS Board in April 2021.

LIFE EXPECTANCY STATE				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
	55	83.06	85.07	85.96
65	84.91	86.06	87.15	87.76
75	87.53	88.04	89.08	89.24

LIFE EXPECTANCY TEACHERS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
	55	84.95	86.26	87.87
65	86.20	86.77	88.70	89.41
75	88.10	88.32	90.19	90.44

HAZARDOUS DUTY				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
	55	82.34	84.13	83.61
65	84.13	84.92	85.10	84.64
75	86.66	87.03	87.60	86.86

JRS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
	55	83.06	87.34	85.96
65	84.91	88.18	87.15	90.67
75	87.53	89.83	89.08	91.77

# Future Risk Analysis

## Mortality/Longevity Risk



In addition to reflecting increases in life expectancy for current members, the new tables also incorporate additional mortality improvements for future generations. The tables below show the life expectancy of members in 2021 as compared to projected life expectancy for members in the year 2041.

LIFE EXPECTANCY STATE				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
	55	85.07	86.37	87.08
65	86.06	87.16	87.76	88.76
75	88.04	88.83	89.24	90.01

LIFE EXPECTANCY TEACHERS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
	55	86.26	87.41	88.99
65	86.77	87.79	89.41	90.33
75	88.32	89.08	90.44	91.18

HAZARDOUS DUTY				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
	55	84.13	85.41	83.65
65	84.92	86.02	84.64	85.76
75	87.03	87.81	86.86	87.67

JRS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
	55	87.34	88.58	90.16
65	88.18	89.24	90.67	91.62
75	89.83	90.62	91.77	92.53

# Future Risk Analysis

## Strategies to Enhance Funding



- Opportunities exist to proactively address some of these concerns and to better position the retirement plans to provide financial stability for current and future members of VRS.
- Accelerating payback of the legacy unfunded liability has the potential to save billions in future employer contributions while enhancing the funded status of the retirement plans. As economic conditions permit, this could be achieved by:
  - Reducing amortization periods for remaining legacy unfunded payments.
  - Maintaining higher employer contribution rates when positive experience would allow for a reduction in employer rates.
  - Considering lump-sum contributions such as those used to pay down the 2010-2012 deferred contributions for State and Teacher plans.
  - Avoiding the expansion of benefits while plans remain underfunded.

- Due to the continued uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 recovery and the corresponding impacts on the economy at large, analysis of future impacts on the VRS fund will continue as new information becomes available.
- VRS will continue to monitor the health of the plans and is committed to providing robust analysis for consideration by the Board and other key stakeholders.



# VRS Stress Test and Sensitivity Analysis

Report to the General Assembly of Virginia

September 2021

Virginia Retirement System

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DRAFT

# STRESS TEST AND SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS MANDATE

Section 51.1-124.30:1 of the *Code of Virginia* requires the Virginia Retirement System to formally adopt a policy to regularly report sensitivity and stress testing analyses for members of the General Assembly (Appendix A). The analyses shall include projections of benefit levels, pension costs, liabilities, and debt reduction under various economic and investment scenarios.

Stress testing, also known as scenario testing, is an analysis or simulation designed to measure the effect on the plans of various projected, generally adverse, investment and actuarial events.

Sensitivity testing examines the effect on the plan of different actuarial assumptions and methods.

This report provides an analysis of the potential impact of various scenarios and hypothetical situations on VRS-administered retirement plans and supports transparency with regard to the future health of the retirement system.

It should be noted that when VRS examines future potential outcomes for the plans, probabilities exist for both positive and negative scenarios. This report focuses primarily on the negative scenarios as they help to identify areas of risk and generally provide the most challenges to plan sponsors.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to assist the VRS Board of Trustees, the Virginia General Assembly, the Governor, stakeholders, and the public to better understand and assess the risks inherent in the funding of the pension system. This year's report investigates various possible risks faced by VRS and measures their potential impact on the defined benefit programs.

While market returns for fiscal year 2021 exceeded expectations, several risks remain and opportunities exist to further strengthen the health of the plans, particularly the statewide retirement plans.

Key results and findings of this report are:

- While economic markets rebounded to provide strong returns for fiscal year 2021, COVID-19 continues to create uncertainty in global markets and unpredictable impacts to future market returns.
- New valuation assumptions will be reflected in the June 30, 2021 rate-setting valuation including generational mortality assumptions which will help counter longevity risk by increasing contribution requirements to cover expected long-term costs. While COVID-19 may affect longevity expectations, it is too early to have any relevant data related to these potential impacts.
- Significant resources must remain dedicated to addressing the amortization of the legacy unfunded liabilities.
- Analysis suggests that accelerating the payback of the legacy unfunded liabilities could provide significant long-term savings and better position the statewide plans to weather future volatility in investment returns, thereby serving to reduce investment risk. However, available resources to take such action are limited at this time due to the current economic climate, limitations on the use certain resources and uncertainty regarding future revenue.
- As roughly two-thirds of benefits are funded by investment income, receiving 100% of the Board-certified actuarially determined contributions not only avoids adding liabilities to the plans, but also ensures assets are available timely to be invested and take advantage of compound interest. Of note, the Governor and General Assembly met and

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

even accelerated the statutory requirement to fund 100% of the Board-certified contribution rates.

- Pension reforms, specifically plan design changes over the past decade, have reduced the future costs of benefits. In addition, these reforms have reduced employers' risk by introducing shared risk through the defined contribution component of the hybrid retirement plan. Approximately 30% of a hybrid plan member's benefit has no future investment or longevity risk for employers.

This report is intended to assist policymakers and stakeholders in assessing the soundness of the System. To better understand the risks associated with funding the System, this report examines a range of potential outcomes, both economic and demographic, that could endanger the long-term funding of the System and prevent the System from reaching full funding. Again, this report focuses primarily on analyzing negative outcomes, since such outcomes would result in the greatest challenges for the plan sponsors and System.

This report is based on the June 30, 2020 Annual Actuarial Valuation and reflects the changes to actuarial assumptions adopted by the VRS Board of Trustees in April 2021. In this report, the focus is on:

- The continued impacts of COVID-19 and resulting forward looking expectations after robust investment returns for fiscal year 2021.
- Risks to long-term funding, including investment volatility, contribution risk, and longevity risk.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

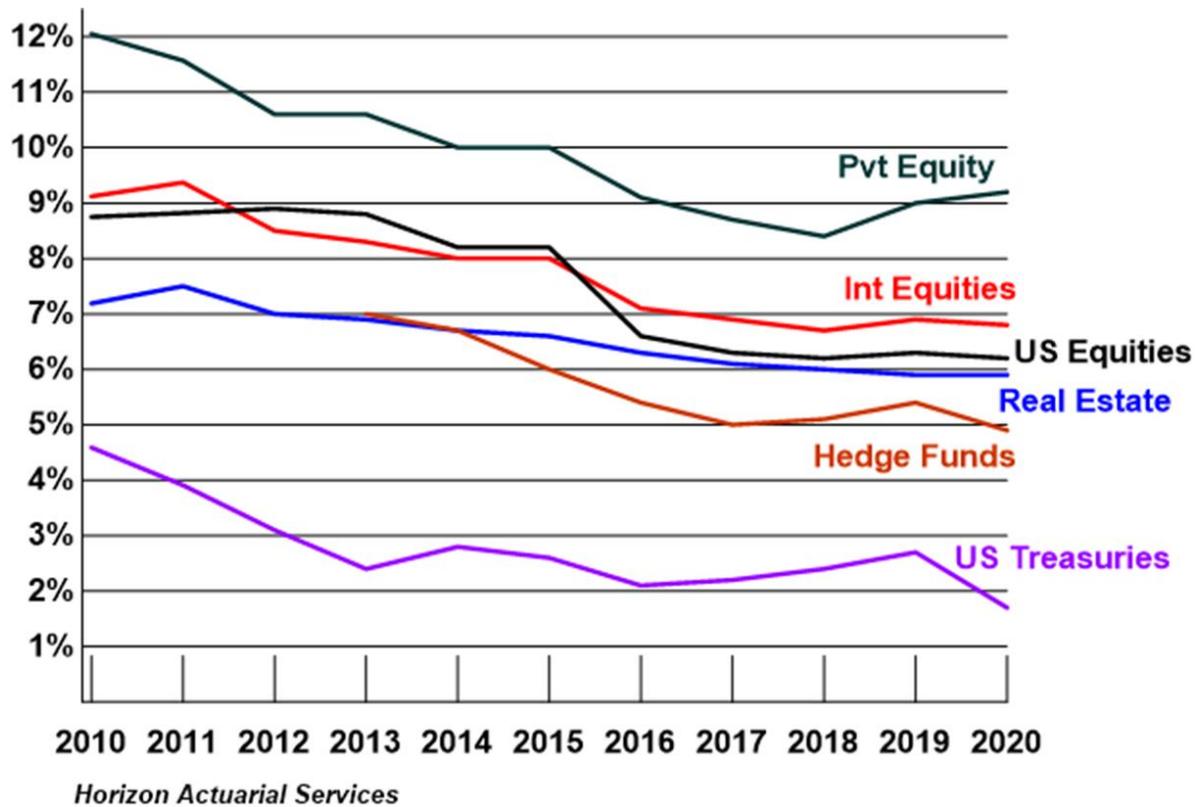
## ***Investment Rate of Return Assumption***

Pension plans are generally prefunded, meaning money is invested during a member's career so that by the time they retire adequate funds will exist to pay benefits for the member while they are retired. Investment earnings on plan contributions currently account for nearly two-thirds of pension funding. The discount rate, the rate used to determine the present value of a future benefit payments, influences the level of contributions required, assuming they will generate investment income throughout a member's career and into retirement. VRS uses the long-term rate of return as the plan discount rate and these terms are used interchangeably in this report.

The discount rate assumption is one of the most influential and sensitive assumptions used in determining the liability of the plan benefits. Market conditions, including the continued low interest rate environment, have resulted in public pension funds reviewing their expected long-term rates of return with many plans lowering future expectations. One challenging facet of setting the investment return assumption that has emerged more recently is a divergence between expected returns over the near term, i.e., the next five to 10 years, and over the longer term, i.e., 20 to 30 years. Following robust market returns in fiscal year 2021, future outperformance in the near term may be materially lower than both historic norms as well as projected returns over longer timeframes. Exhibit 1 shows public pension plan market return expectations have generally declined over time for various asset classes.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 1



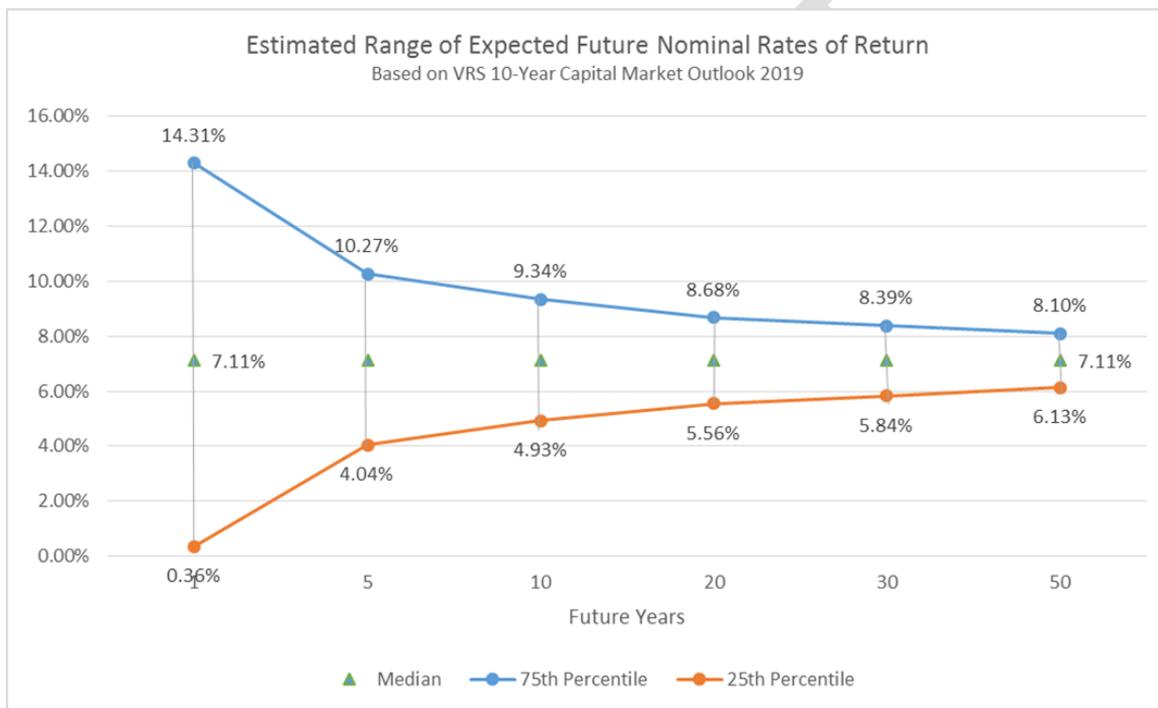
The discount rate reflects expectations of what investment earnings the markets will deliver in the future, and it is calculated based on two components: expected price inflation and real rate of return. A change in either of those components over the long term would necessitate further evaluation of the discount rate.

Fund long-term health requires careful management and decision making for the asset allocation needed to fund members' pensions and Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEBs), such as group life insurance and the health insurance credit, over the long term. The VRS Board of Trustees conducted an Asset Liability Study during 2019 to ensure responsible investment practices and strategies are being used in recommending and deploying investment allocations. As shown in Exhibit 2, using the plan's 2.5% assumed rate of inflation and the 10-year forward looking capital market estimates and policy investment targets provided by the VRS investment staff, a statistical analysis of the

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

reasonable range for the plan's assumed investment rate of return provided an expected median nominal rate of return of 7.11%, with a reasonable range of 6.13% to 8.10%, representing the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles, respectively. The nominal rate of return is the total rate of return earned on an investment before adjusting for any deductions and premiums, such as investment fees, trading costs, tax expenses, and inflation.

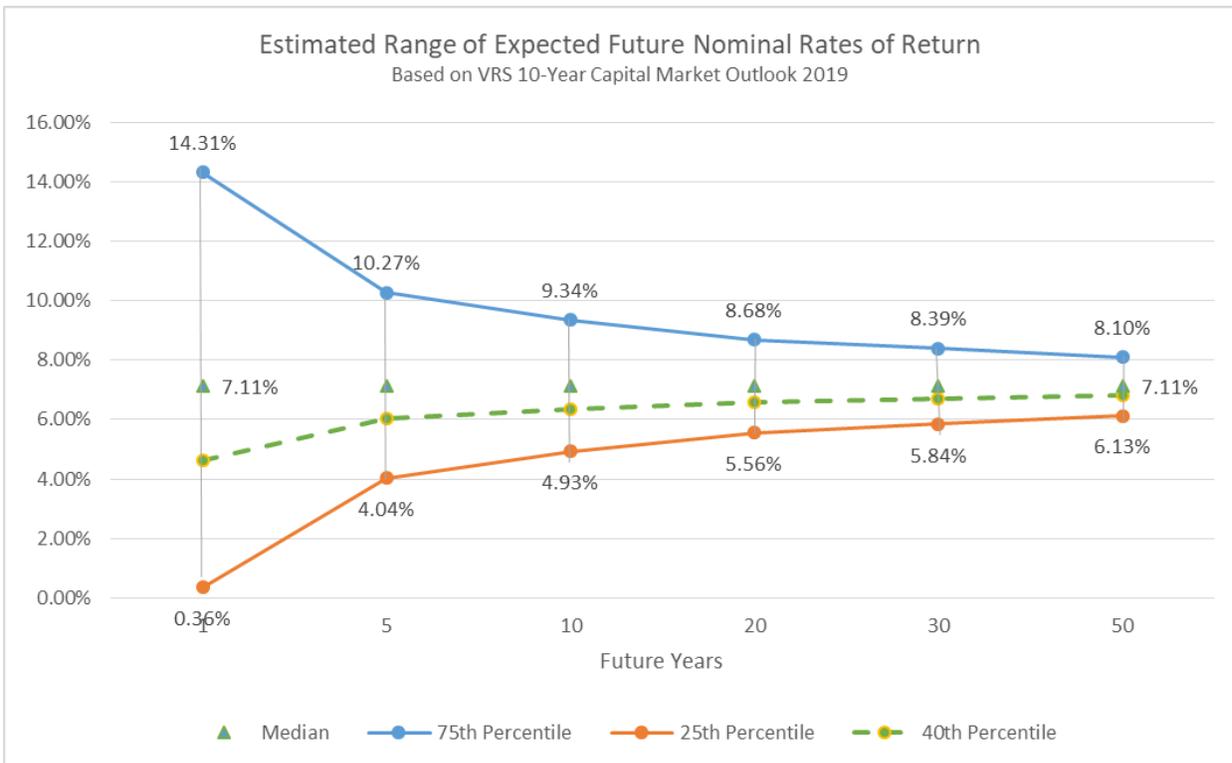
Exhibit 2



Long-term practice has been to set the investment rate of return expectation at the median assumed rate, but there are reasons to alter past practice. Due to the divergence between expected returns over the near term, i.e., the next five to 10 years, and over the longer term, i.e., 20 to 30 years, reflecting a blended discount rate to incorporate near-term uncertainty in the markets would require selecting a discount rate below the median expected long-term rate. As displayed in Exhibit 3, while the median return of 7.11% is expected to be achieved 50% of the time, selecting a discount rate of 6.75% would move the assumption closer to the 40th percentile, providing approximately a 60% chance of achieving the long-term rate of return over time.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 3



In effect, the downside tail risk (i.e., the chance of a loss occurring due to a rare event, as predicted by a probability distribution) is mitigated by selecting a rate at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile rather than the median.

### ***Analysis of Discount Rate Sensitivity***

Analysis of discount rate sensitivity on employer contribution rates gives a sense of the long-term risk to the employer contribution rates and changes to the funded status. The analysis provides the impact on employer contribution rates assuming discount rates that are up to two percentage points above or below the current valuation discount rate. This analysis gives an indication of the potential required employer contribution rates if the discount rate ranged from 4.75% to 8.75% over the long term. Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Statement 67 currently requires sensitivity analysis of plus or minus 1% from the plan's discount rate. Adding a wider range of plus or minus

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

2% around the plan discount rate resulted from discussions during deliberations of the Commission on Employee Retirement Security and Pension Reform.

Exhibits 4 and 5 illustrate how various assumed annual rates of return would affect pension contribution rates for the State and Teacher plans had they been applied to the June 30, 2020 valuation results adjusted for assumption changes adopted in April 2021. A lower assumed annual rate of return requires higher contribution rates from employers. A higher assumed annual rate of return requires lower employer contribution rates. Although the assumed rate of return dictates how contribution rates are calculated in the short term, the actual investment returns will determine what portion of pension costs must be covered by contributions in the long term.

Exhibit 4 – State Plan

(\$Thousands)

Discount Rate	Current				
	8.75%	7.75%	6.75%	5.75%	4.75%
Total Normal Cost Rate	6.58%	7.84%	9.55%	11.92%	15.23%
Member Contribution Rate	4.57%	4.57%	4.57%	4.57%	4.57%
Employer Normal Cost Rate	2.01%	3.27%	4.98%	7.35%	10.66%
Administrative Expense Load	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%
Total Employer Normal Cost Rate	2.30%	3.56%	5.27%	7.64%	10.95%
Total Amortization Rate	2.15%	5.63%	9.19%	12.85%	16.60%
Defined Contribution Hybrid Plan	0.99%	0.99%	0.99%	0.99%	0.99%
Total Employer Rate	5.44%	10.18%	15.45%	21.48%	28.54%
Change in Employer Rate	(10.01)%	(5.27)%	0.00%	6.03%	13.09%
Estimated Change in Annual Funding	(443,292)	(233,382)		267,038	579,690
Unfunded Liability	1,951,855	4,163,206	6,791,187	9,927,861	13,682,196
Funded Status	90.8%	82.3%	74.0%	66.1%	58.6%

Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation adjusted to include assumption changes adopted by the VRS Board of Trustees in April 2021 and represents employer contribution rates developed for informational purposes only.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

## Exhibit 5 – Teacher Plan

(\$Thousands)

Discount Rate	Current				
	8.75%	7.75%	6.75%	5.75%	4.75%
Total Normal Cost Rate	6.68%	8.29%	10.45%	13.41%	17.47%
Member Contribution Rate	4.65%	4.65%	4.65%	4.65%	4.65%
Employer Normal Cost Rate	2.03%	3.64%	5.80%	8.76%	12.82%
Administrative Expense Load	0.27%	0.27%	0.27%	0.27%	0.27%
Total Employer Normal Cost Rate	2.30%	3.91%	6.07%	9.03%	13.09%
Total Amortization Rate	2.39%	6.20%	10.17%	14.35%	18.76%
Defined Contribution Hybrid Plan	0.74%	0.74%	0.74%	0.74%	0.74%
Total Employer Rate	5.43%	10.85%	16.98%	24.12%	32.59%
Change in Employer Rate	(11.55)%	(6.13)%	0.00%	7.14 %	15.61 %
Estimated Change in Annual Funding	(981,579)	(520,959)		606,794	1,326,619
Unfunded Liability	3,486,398	8,299,118	14,105,107	21,168,362	29,834,282
Funded Status	91.5%	81.9%	72.7%	64.0%	55.7%

Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation adjusted to include assumption changes adopted by the VRS Board of Trustees in April 2021 and represents employer contribution rates developed for informational purposes only.

## INVESTMENT RISK

### Possible Future Outcomes

Investment returns will have a greater impact on the funding of the plans as the VRS plans continue to mature. When investment returns are below expectations, the unfunded actuarial accrued liability increases and additional contributions are needed, which historically have been funded by employers. Greater maturity creates greater sensitivity to gains and losses and bigger challenges related to underfunding. “Pension plan maturity” does not have a precise definition. The most commonly cited measures use various plan population metrics. However, measures that compare a plan’s size to its financial resources are more directly related to risk and outcomes. Some typical measures of maturity are:

## FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

- Retirees to active members
- Plan liability to revenue
- Assets to payroll
- Retiree liability to total plan liability
- Liabilities to contributions

Using the plan assets to covered payroll metric, with covered payroll being the cumulative creditable compensation used in developing members benefits, and assets being the current market value of assets the State plan had a ratio of 3.3 as of June 30, 1999 meaning a 10% investment loss would be equivalent to approximately 33% of covered payroll of the State plan at that time. While the loss would be amortized or collected through employer contributions over a 20-year period, it would still represent a significant increase in employer rates. Following the 27.5% return in 2021, that ratio is expected to be approximately 4.5, meaning a 10% investment loss would be equivalent to approximately 45% of covered payroll. This metric helps to show that as the plans continue to mature and assets continue to become a greater percentage of the covered payroll, downside risk associated with negative returns poses a greater risk to contribution volatility.

Within this report we will be projecting future outcomes under two sets of analyses, deterministic or stochastic.

Deterministic analysis assumes full certainty about future outcomes, particularly with future plan experience and assumptions including investment returns. The deterministic approach is useful for gauging the general direction of change and associated consequences and is useful when trying to assess best case or worst-case scenarios or isolating the impacts of a single assumption such as lowering the plan discount rate.

Stochastic analysis reflects the realistic view that pension plan investment returns, like the market itself, may be volatile and uncertain. Rather than using exact assumptions, the model uses probability distributions to provide a range of possible results based on these probabilities. The projections are intended to present general contribution rate trends under varying economic scenarios and help to quantify the likelihood and magnitude of possible future outcomes.

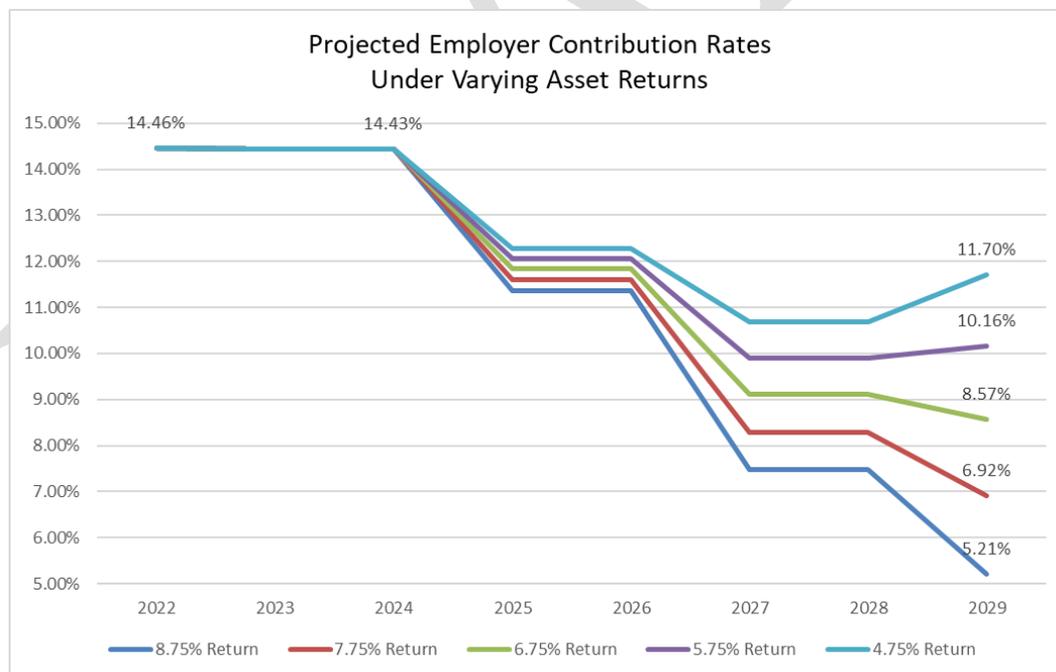
Exhibit 6 below is a deterministic projection that provides a range of expected employer contribution rates under varying rates of return from 4.75% - 8.75% over the next eight

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

years. The projections incorporate the 2021 fiscal year investment return of 27.5%. Note, that due to asset smoothing, only a portion of the investment gain will be recognized in the 2021 valuation. Investment gains will continue to be recognized over the next four years which is why we see a downward trend in employer rates over the eight-year period. If the fund earned 5.75% each year for the next five years, employer contribution rates for the State plan would still decrease from 14.46% to 10.16% beginning in 2029. Conversely, if the fund earned 7.75% each of the next five years, employer contribution rates would decrease further from 14.46% to 6.92% beginning in 2029.

If all assumptions are met, employer contribution rates are inherently expected to trend lower in the future due to blending in the lower cost hybrid plan as new members are enrolled into the plan as well as recognizing the large investment gain from fiscal year 2021. This can be seen most clearly in the 6.75% return scenario in Exhibit 6 below which assumes no additional investment gains or losses over the projection period but shows that the contribution rate trends downward.

Exhibit 6 - State Plan



Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation adjusted to incorporate new plan assumptions and the 27.5% fiscal year 2021 fund return.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 7 shows probabilistic or stochastic projections of future investment returns and the impact on future contribution rates for the State plan. These stochastic projections are based on VRS's capital market outlook and target asset allocation. Capital market outlooks are heavily influenced by the starting valuations, and after robust returns following 2021, capital market outlooks have trended downward over the next ten years assuming further gains will be harder to come by in the near term. A longer-term outlook over twenty years moderates investment returns and provides a median return of approximately 6.75% based on the VRS target allocation. Under the "baseline" scenario there is a 50% probability that employer contribution rates will be between 2.65% and 12.99% by fiscal year 2029 with an expected employer rate of 8.57%.

The new capital market assumptions will be the "baseline" scenario used in the scenario testing that follows later in the report.

Exhibit 7

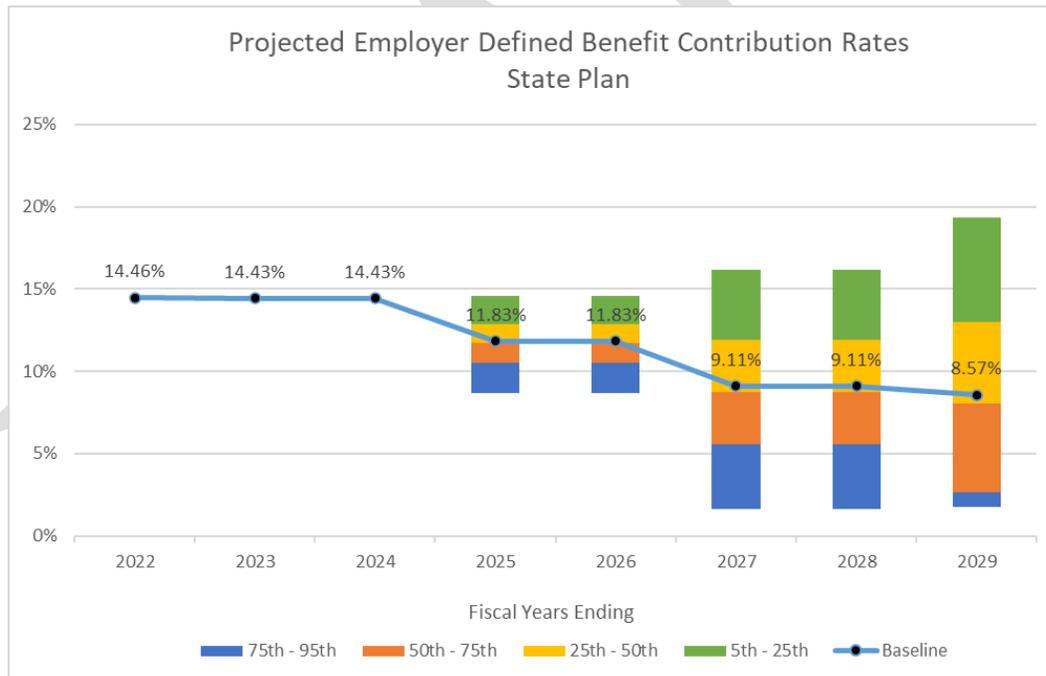
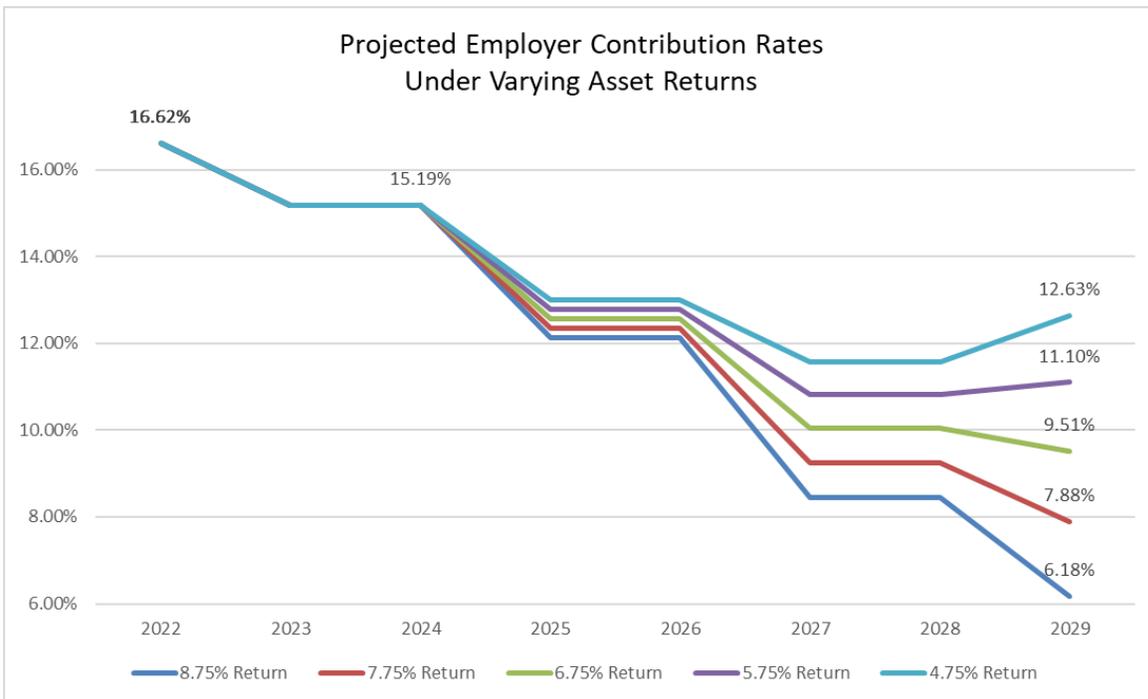


Exhibit 8 provides similar deterministic analysis for the Teacher plan. As with the State plan, the Teacher plan also trends downward due to incorporating the 2021 investment return through asset smoothing. In addition, the Teacher plan also reflects a sizeable decrease in 2023 due to 10-year deferred contributions being paid off with an

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

accelerated payment in June 2021 offered by the Governor and approved by General Assembly.

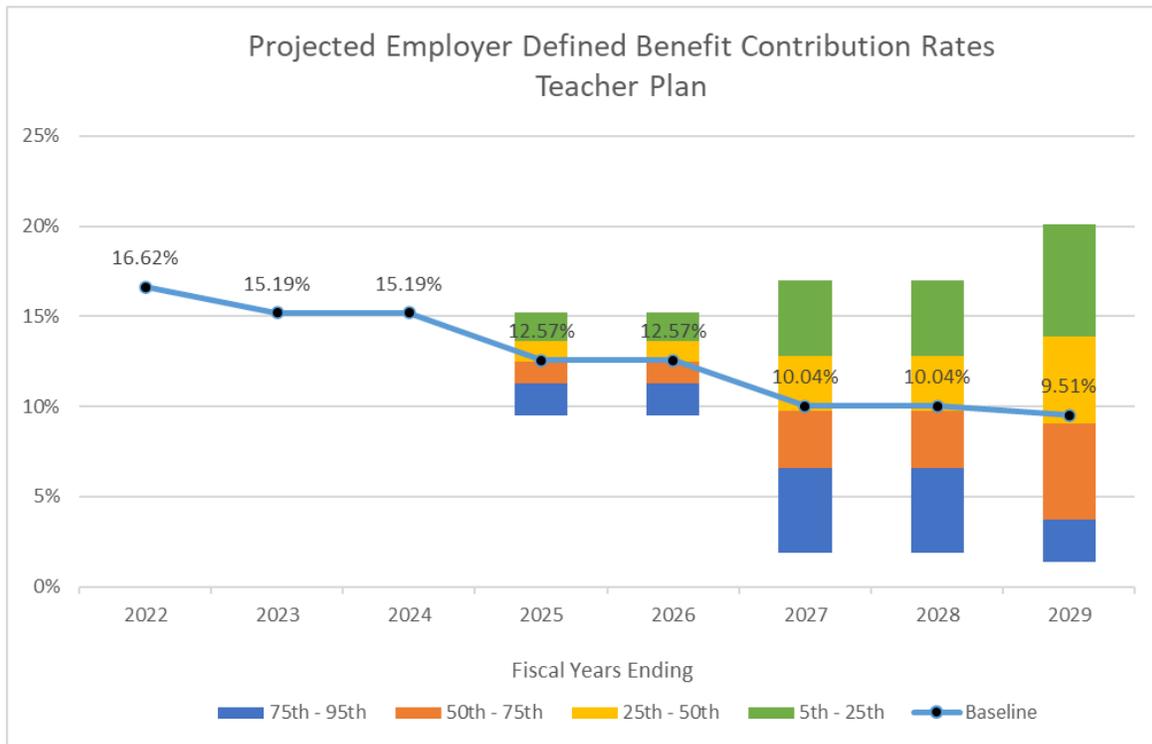
Exhibit 8 – Teacher Plan



Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation adjusted to incorporate new plan assumptions and the 27.5% fiscal year 2021 fund return.

Exhibit 9 shows the probabilistic or stochastic projections of future investment returns and the impact on future contribution rates for the Teacher plan. There is a 50% probability that by fiscal year 2029 employer rates will be between 3.72% and 13.89%, with an expected contribution rate of 9.51%.

Exhibit 9



### Scenario Testing (Unexpected or Unpredictable Economic Events)

Fiscal year 2021 saw a major rebound in markets following the disruption in fiscal year 2020 due to COVID-19. The stronger than expected rebound in global growth, along with various other factors such as extraordinary monetary and fiscal stimulus, as well as a jump in demand for goods and services as economies reopened have caused concern over the potential for higher inflation in the near term. And while inflation is a chief concern, as the world begins to emerge from the pandemic, on a global scale questions still remain surrounding such issues as the pace and availability of vaccinations, the possibility of additional virus variants, and the uncertainty this may cause to financial markets.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

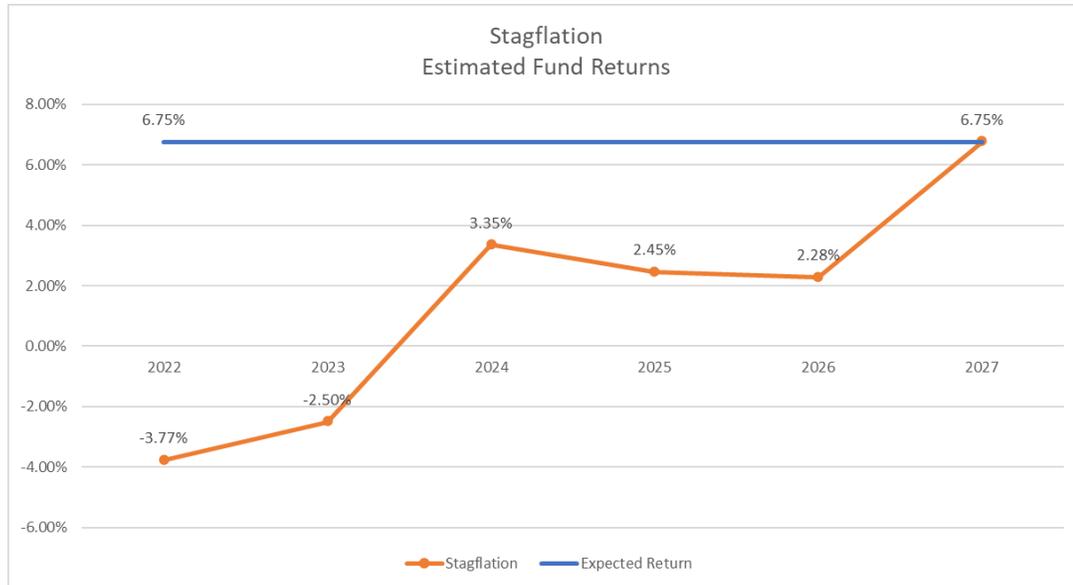
**The VRS investment team compiled three economic scenarios that provide a framing of possible global economic outcomes that could occur over the next several years. The following three illustrative scenarios are estimates of possible scenarios designed to show the potential magnitude of the impacts on plan funding. There is no degree of certainty that any of these three scenarios will correctly simulate what will actually occur over the next several years. Each of these scenarios is front-loaded, meaning that the impact is modeled to occur over the next several years.**

**While the scenarios are merely illustrations, they help to highlight the vulnerability of the fund to unexpected market shocks and the magnitude by which these scenarios can quickly degrade funded status and accelerate employer contributions requirements.**

- **Stagflation:** Stagflation is characterized by slow economic recovery and relatively high unemployment, or economic stagflation, which at the same time is accompanied by rising inflation. The inflation modeled under this scenario will fluctuate between 5.9% and 12.0% during the first six years averaging 8.6%, which is well above the 2.5% assumed rate of inflation.

- While nominal returns are relatively high for equity, real returns reflect much slower growth and are negative for years 1-5 in this scenario, implying that this period of stagflation is front-loaded and then tapers off and reverts to the baseline thereafter.
- Fixed income is hit hardest initially in years 1-4 but then stagnates slightly below the baseline for the remainder of the scenario.
- Credit Strategies rate-sensitive exposure is adversely affected.
- Liabilities and benefit payments are also impacted in this scenario as inflation exceeds the assumed 2.5% level during most years causing liability losses and higher cash flow requirements due to cost of living increases applicable to pension benefits.

Exhibit 10

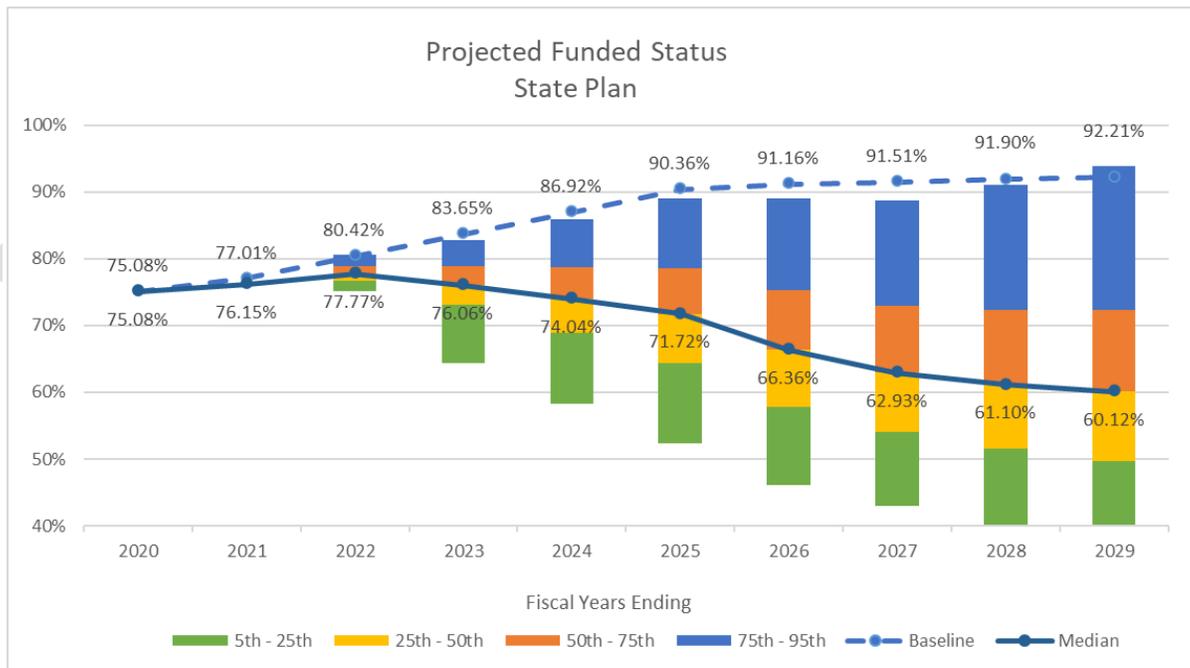
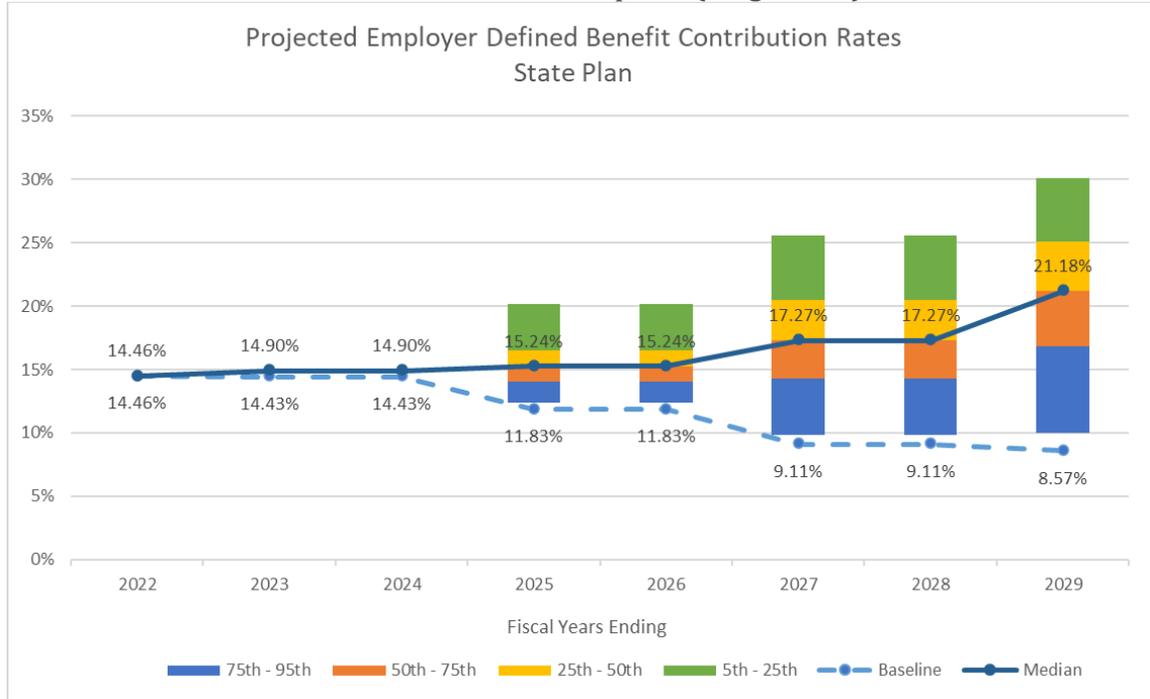


The expected cumulative investment return from 2022 – 2027 would be 1.36% as compared to 6.75%, which is the assumed return over this period.

Below are estimated impacts on funding measures over the next eight years for the State and Teacher plans under the stagflation economic scenario. Due to depressed returns as well as actuarial losses the contribution rate would slowly increase over the eight-year period to just below 20% of covered payroll for the State plan and just over 20% for the Teacher plan. The funded status would also suffer in this scenario dropping below 70% for both the State and Teacher plan in a relatively short period of time adding approximately \$3.0 billion in unfunded liability to the State and \$6.0 billion to the Teacher plan over the first five years.

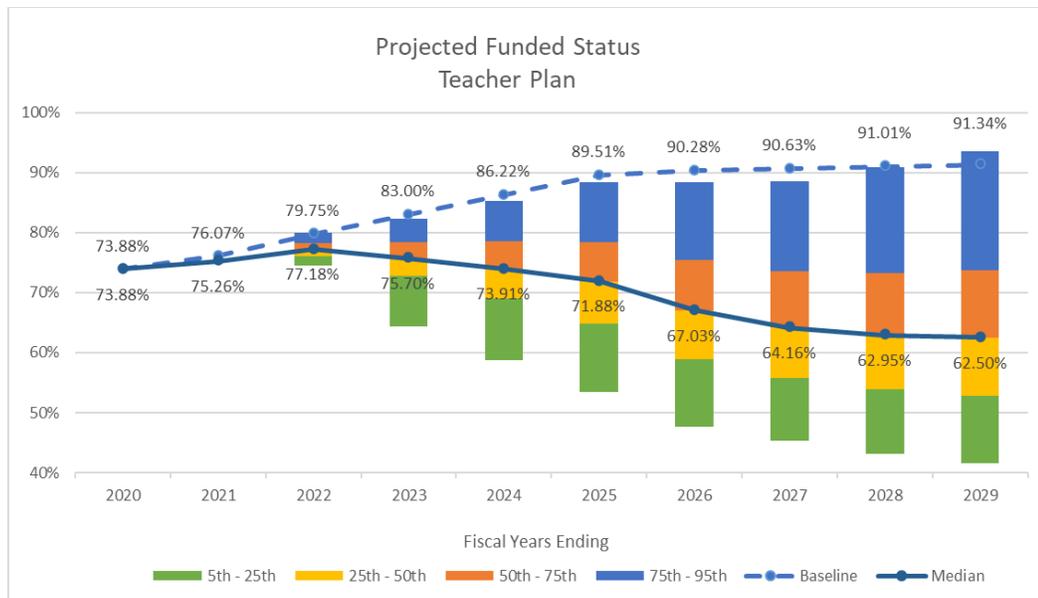
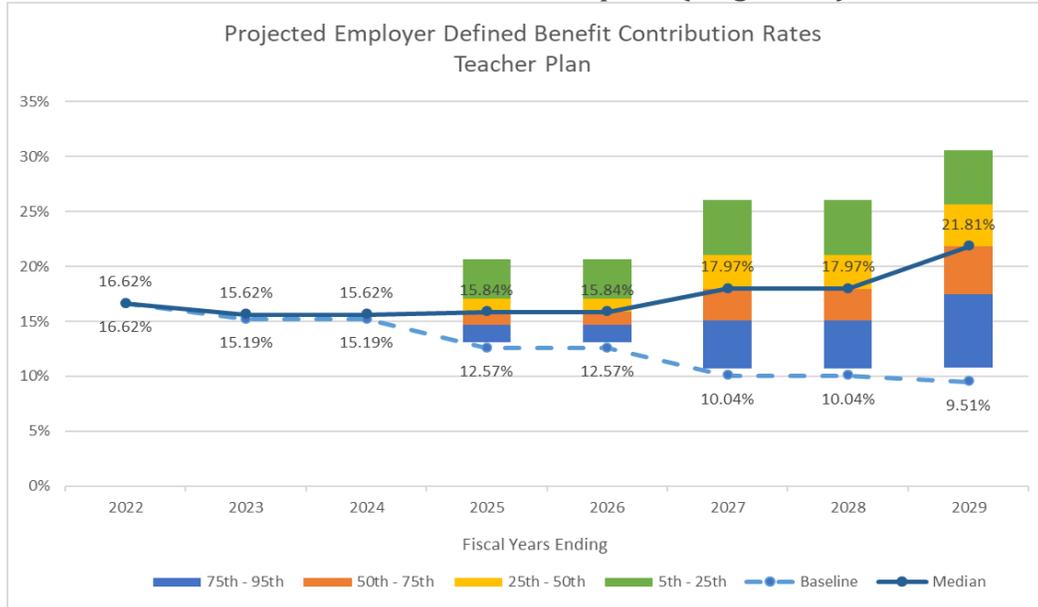
# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 11 – State Plan Impacts (Stagflation)



# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 12 – Teacher Plan Impacts (Stagflation)

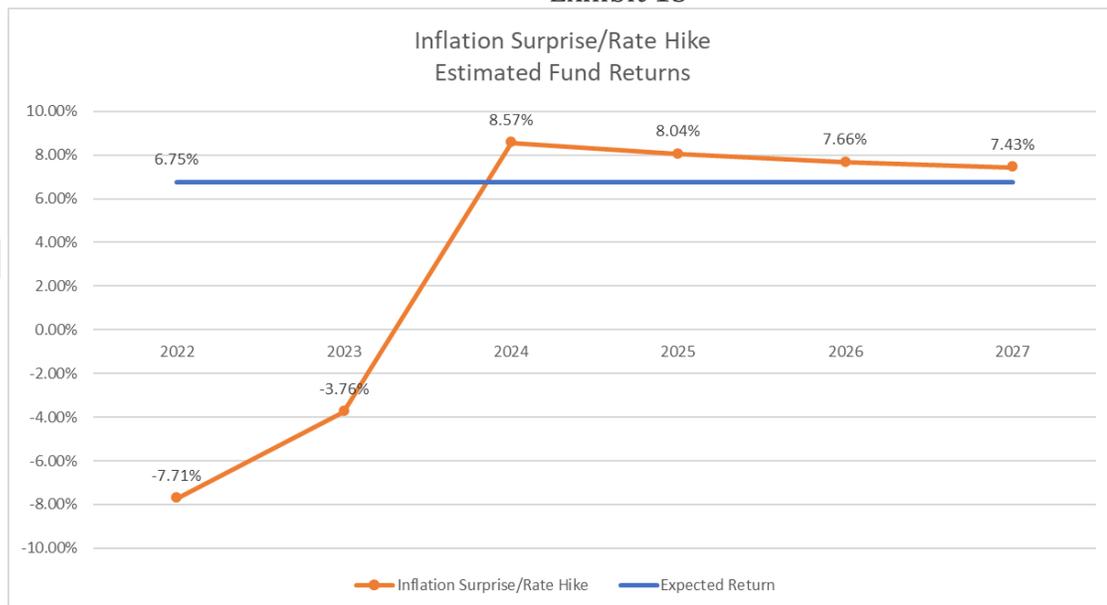


# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

**Inflation Surprise/Rate Hike:** This scenario incorporates continued upward trends in both wage and commodity inflation. The inflation modeled under this scenario will fluctuate between 2.5% and 12.0% during the first six years is expected to average 5.9%, which is well above the 2.5% assumed rate of inflation over the first six years. ,

- Inflation spikes for years 1-2 and persists as the Federal Reserve finds their policy tools to be ineffective over that time period.
- Period of inflation is followed by elevated interest rates which negatively affect discounted cash flows.
- Inflation is under control after two years and then all asset classes return to the baseline scenario.
- Liabilities and benefit payments are also impacted in this scenario as inflation exceeds the assumed 2.5% level during the earlier years of this scenario causing liability losses due to cost of living increases applicable to pension benefits.

Exhibit 13



## FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

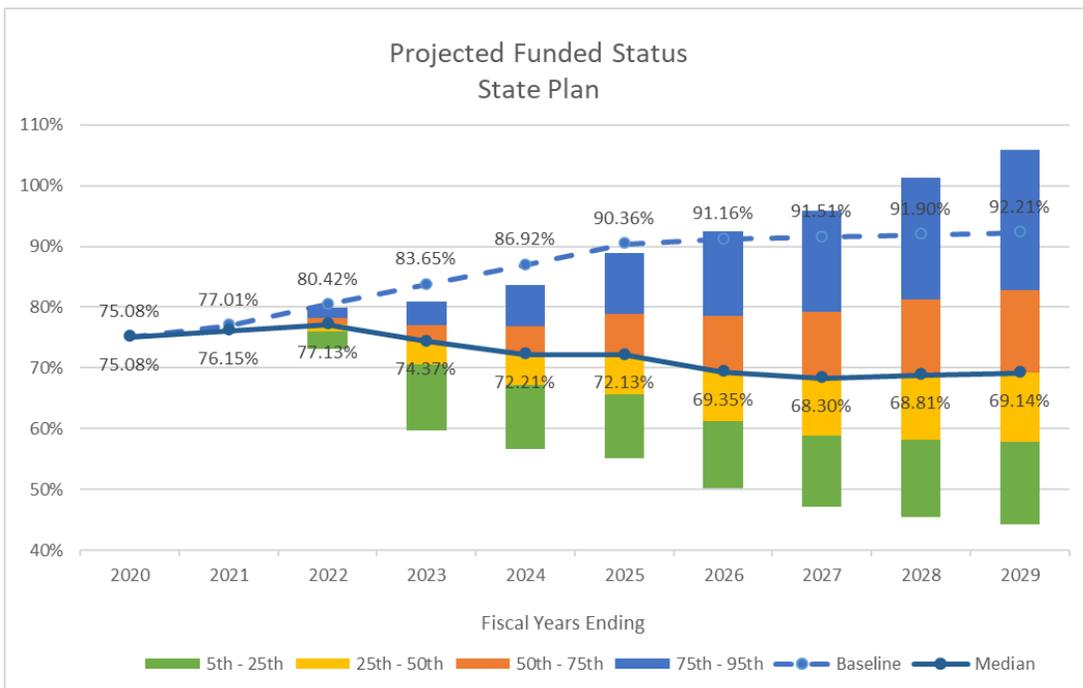
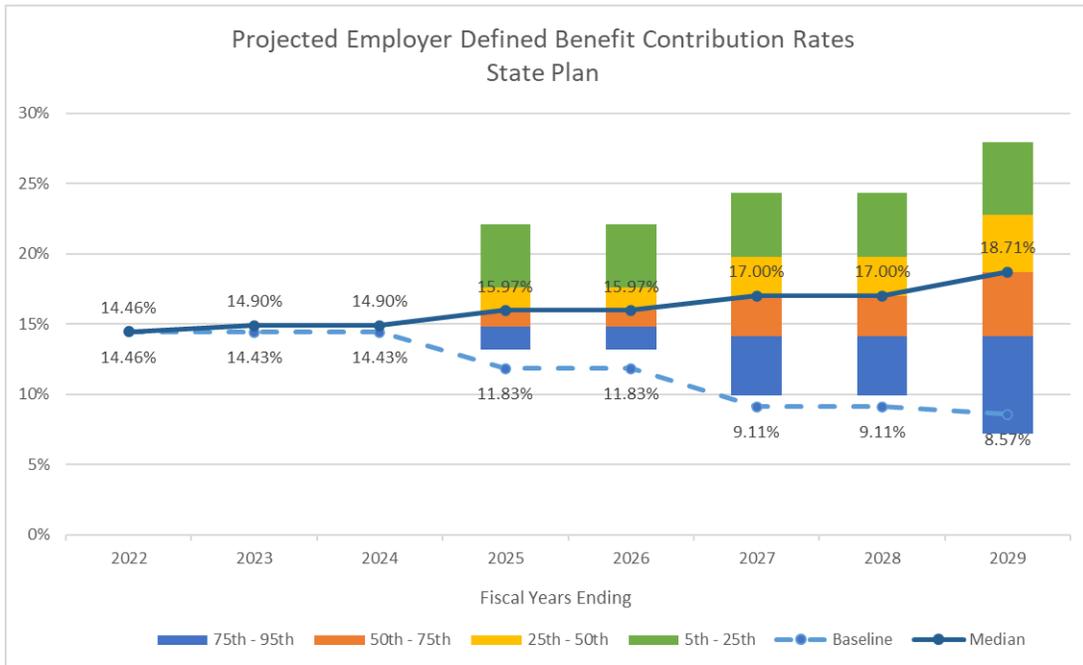
The expected cumulative return from 2022 – 2027 would be 3.16% as compared to 6.75%, which is the assumed return over this period.

Below are estimated impacts on funding measures over the next eight years for the State and Teacher plans under the Inflation Surprise/Rate Hike economic scenario.

Due to depressed returns in the first two years as well as actuarial losses due to higher than expected inflation, the contribution rate would slowly increase over the eight year period to just below 18% of covered payroll for the State plan and just over 18% for the Teacher plan. The funded status would also suffer in this scenario dropping into the low 70s for both the State and Teacher plan in a relatively short period of time adding approximately \$2.0 billion in unfunded liability to the State and \$4.0 billion to the Teacher plan over the first five years.

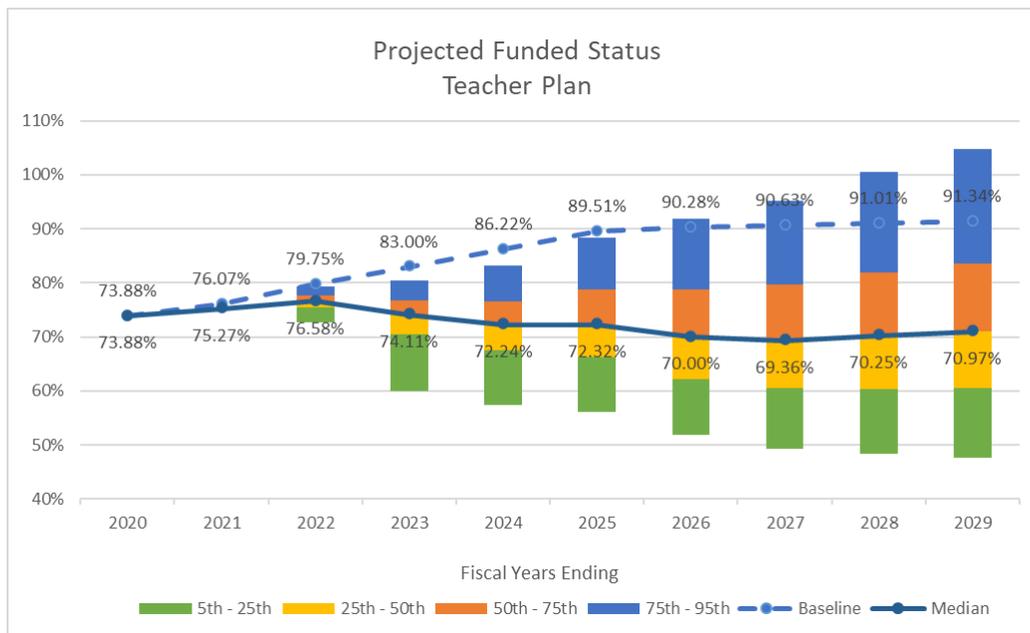
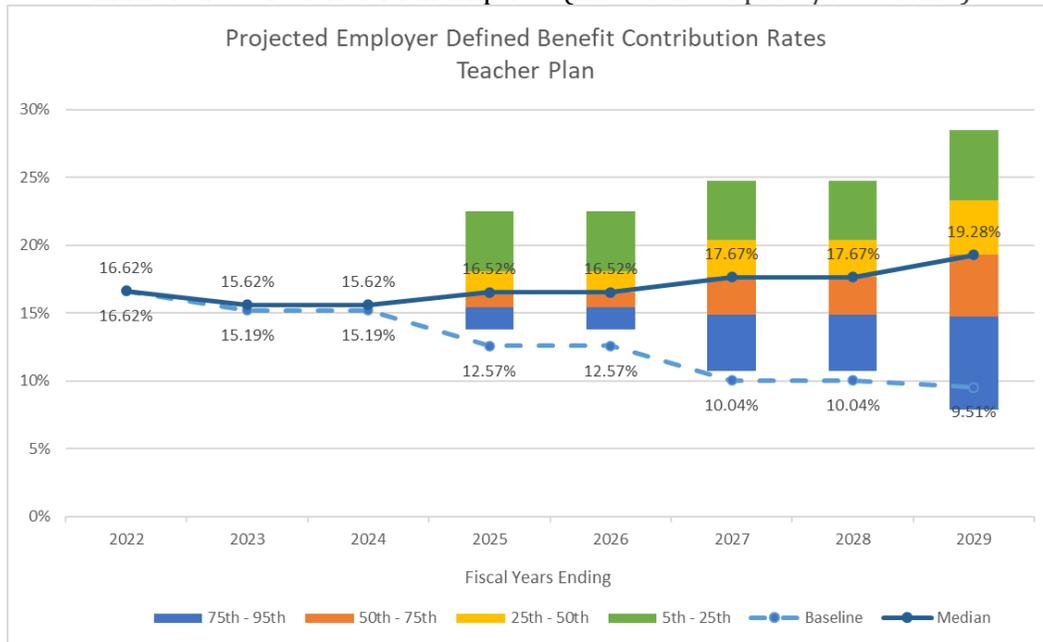
# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 14 – State Plan Impacts (Inflation Surprise/Rate Hike)



# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 15 – Teacher Plan Impacts (Inflation Surprise/Rate Hike)

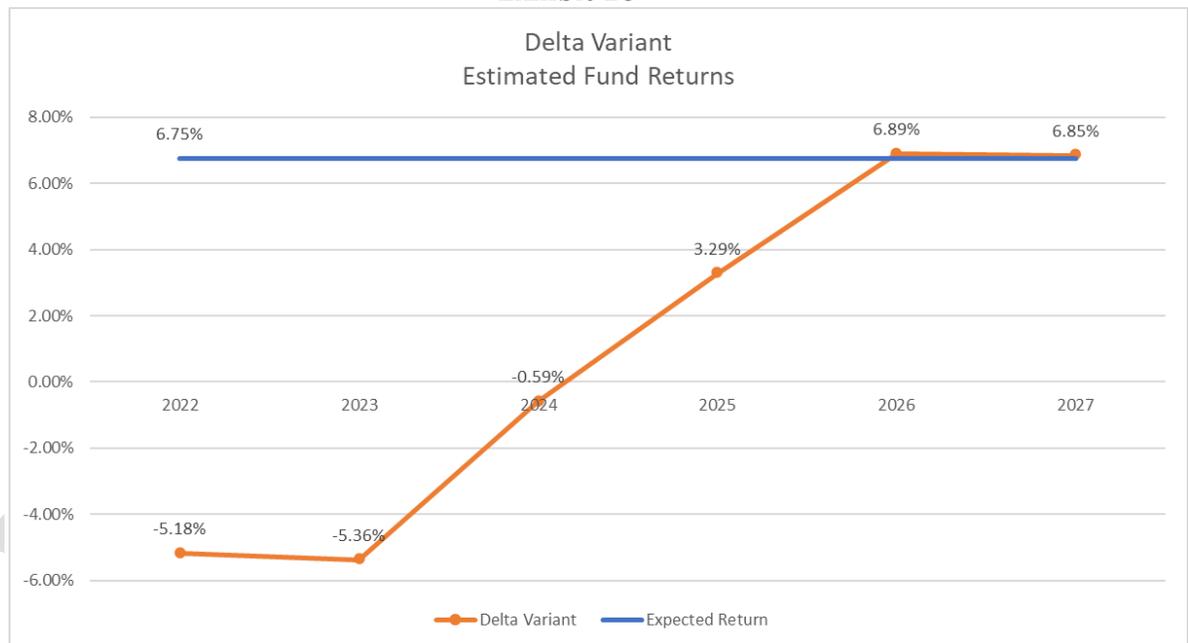


# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

• **Delta or Other COVID Variants:** In this scenario COVID-19 becomes endemic forcing rolling shut-downs in various degrees of magnitude, depending on local infection rates.

- The original vaccines are found to be increasingly ineffective against variants.
- It takes 3-4 years to return to normal in a global economy that is contracting over that period with a slow return to the baseline.
- Risk assets hit hardest in years 1-3.

Exhibit 16



The expected cumulative return from 2022 – 2027 would be 0.85% as compared to 6.75%, which is the assumed return over this period.

Below are estimated impacts on funding measures over the next eight years for the State and Teacher plans assuming a Delta or Other COVID Variant economic scenario.

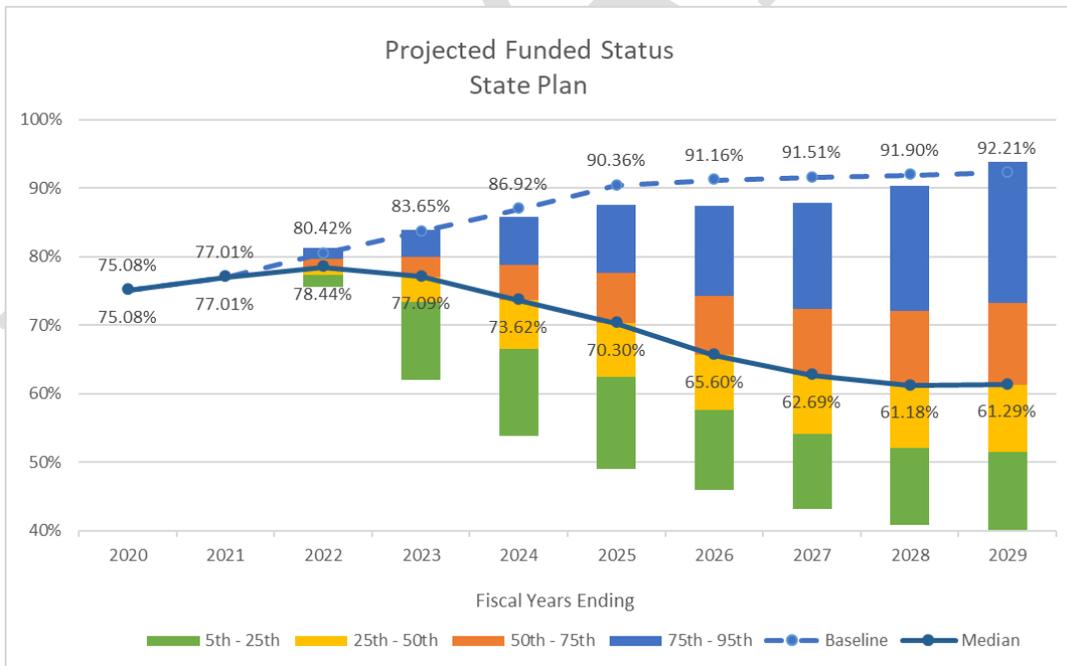
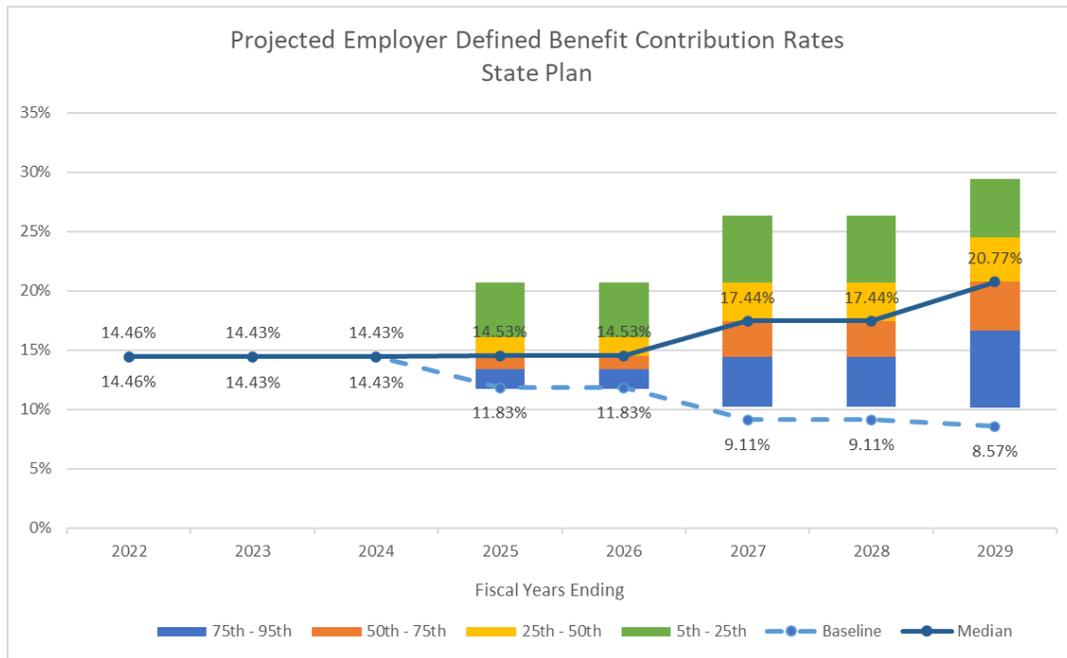
## FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Due to depressed returns in the first three years, the contribution rate would slowly increase over the eight-year period to just over 20% of covered payroll for the State plan and just over 21% for the Teacher plan. The funded status would also suffer in this scenario dropping into the low 60s for both the State and Teacher plan in a relatively short period of time adding approximately \$4.5 billion in unfunded liability to the State and \$8.0 billion to the Teacher plan over the first five years.

DRAFT

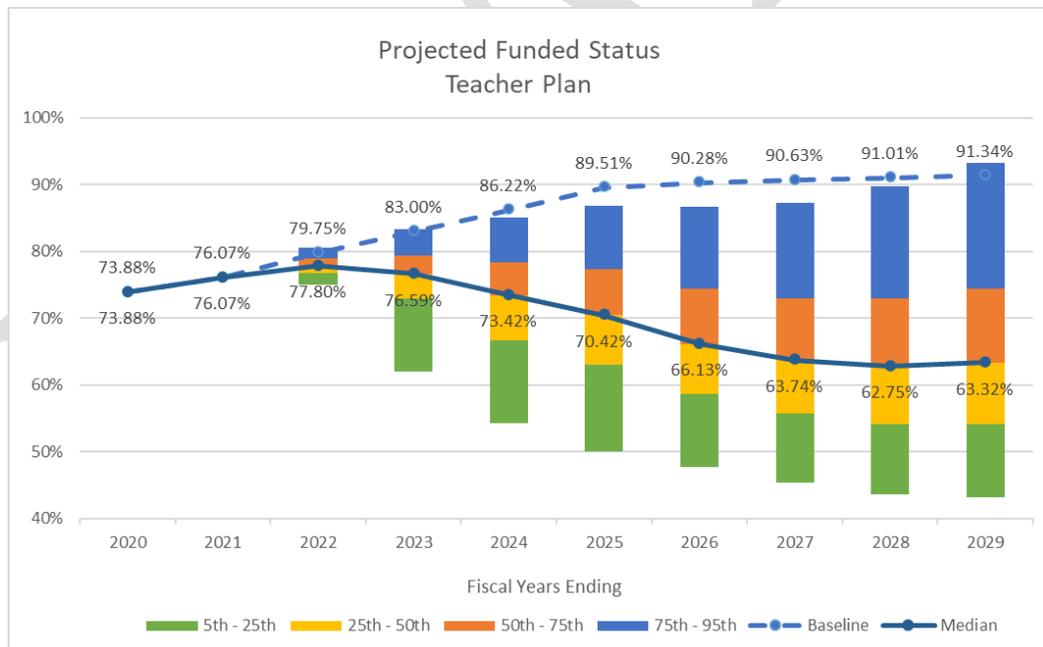
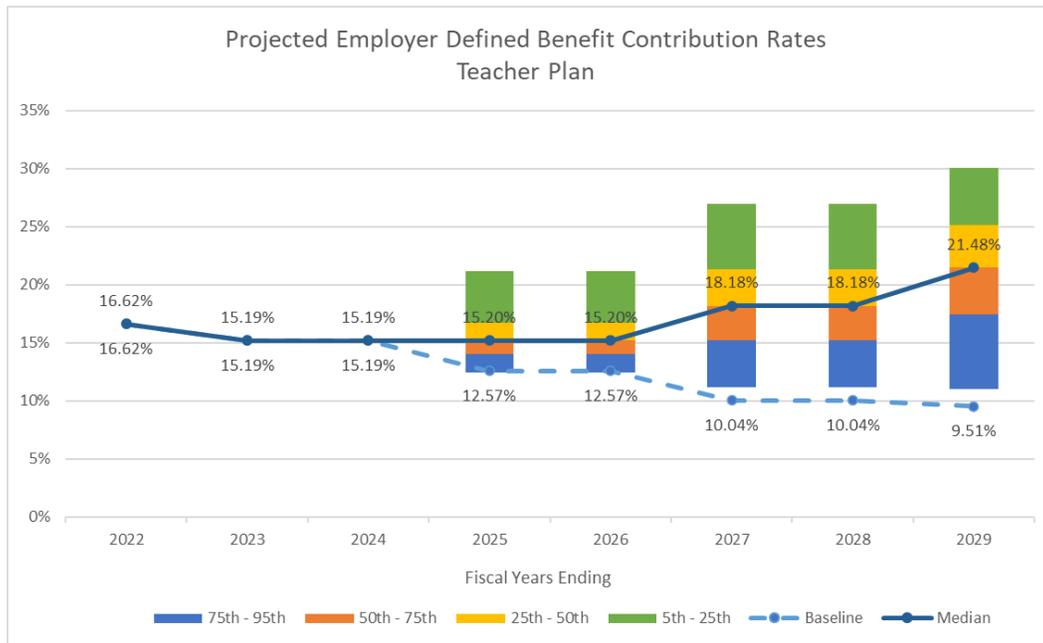
# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 17 – State Plan Impacts (Delta Variant)



# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 18 – Teacher Plan Impacts (Delta Variant)



# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

## Cash Flow Projections

Defined benefit pension plans are designed to provide employees with a guaranteed income stream upon retirement. Contributions in VRS plans are generally shared by employees and their employer and are a systematic way of prefunding the system's costs. The benefit of prefunding is that investment returns on the prefunded plan assets reduce the employer's long-term contributions.

Retirement plans that have been in operation for a number of years generally have contributions coming into the plan and benefits being paid out. The net (non-investment) cash flow is the difference between the contributions and benefits and expenses of the fund. These cash flows will vary for each plan since all plans have different demographics and maturities.

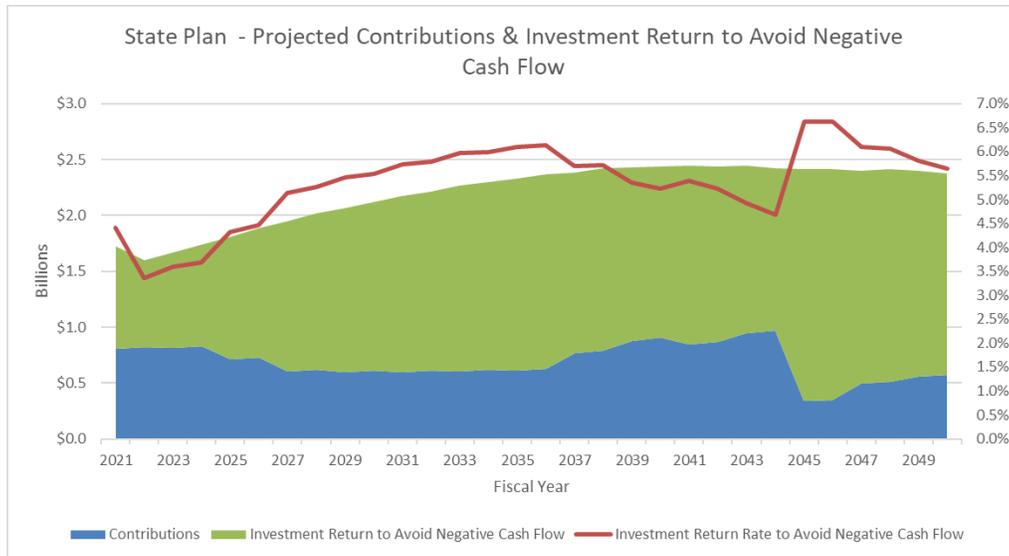
Mature plans often have negative cash flows over time, which is considered the normal cycle of pension plans. Negative cash flows do not necessarily imply a plan is in trouble. In fact, part of the benefit and efficiency of prefunding is so the investment returns can pay a significant portion of the benefit payments.

Exhibit 19 below shows the projected contributions and investment returns needed by the State plan to avoid negative cash flows over the next 30 years. The blue portion of the chart represents the contributions that are expected to be made each year. The green portion of the chart represents the level of investment return that is needed, while the blue and green added together represent the expected benefit payments from the plan. The red line is the level of investment return needed (scale on left of the chart) to generate the investment return (green portion of chart) to keep the incoming cash flow (contributions plus investment return) equal to the plan's expected benefit payments and expenses. Benefit payments in the State plan are expected to peak in 2037 before beginning to reduce as more members are covered by the Hybrid Retirement Plan. The overall employer cost of the Hybrid Plan is lower than Plan 1 or Plan 2, which means that as the population covered by the Hybrid Plan grows fewer employer contributions will go into the plan. Note that the drop off in contribution requirements in 2044 coincides with the payoff of the legacy unfunded liabilities. Fewer contribution dollars flowing into the plan generally causes more reliance on investment returns to cover cash flow requirements in later years.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

The investment return needed over this period to avoid negative cash flow ranges from 3.35% to 6.63%, with an average return of approximately 5.33% to stay cash flow positive to the fund.

Exhibit 19



Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation adjusted for new assumptions approved by the VRS Board of Trustees in the spring of 2021.

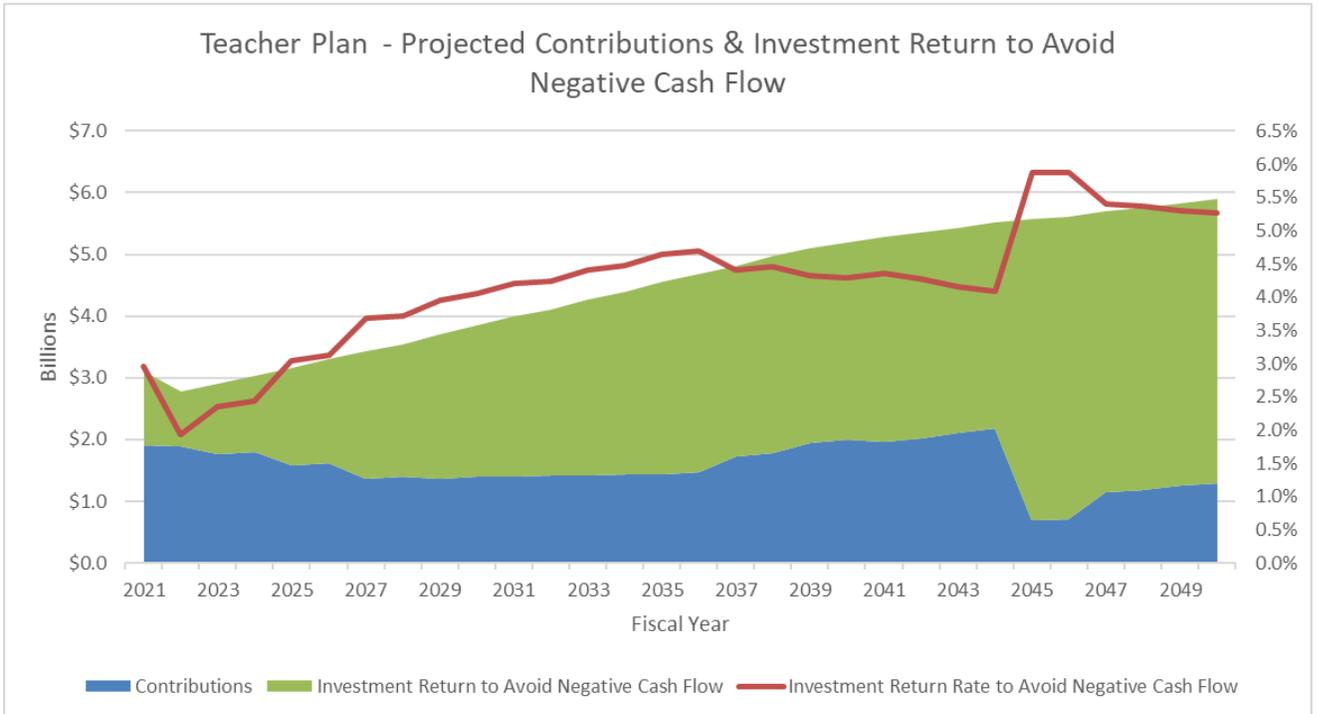
Exhibit 20 below shows the projected contributions and investment returns needed by the Teacher plan to avoid negative cash flows over the next 30 years. Benefit payments in the Teacher plan are expected to peak in 2048 compared to 2037 for the State plan as turnover in this plan is less than in the State plan. Note that a similar drop off in contribution requirements in 2044 also coincides with the payoff of the legacy unfunded liabilities in the Teacher plan. Fewer contribution dollars flowing into the plan will require higher investment returns to cover cash flow requirements in later years.

The investment return needed over this period to avoid negative cash flow ranges from 1.94% to 5.87%, with an average return of approximately 4.18% to stay cash flow positive. The average return needed for the Teacher plan is less than the State plan due

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

to higher contribution requirements for the Teacher plan during much of the projection period, which offsets the need for additional investment return to cover plan costs during those years.

Exhibit 20



Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation adjusted for new assumptions approved by the VRS Board of Trustees in spring 2021.

## FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

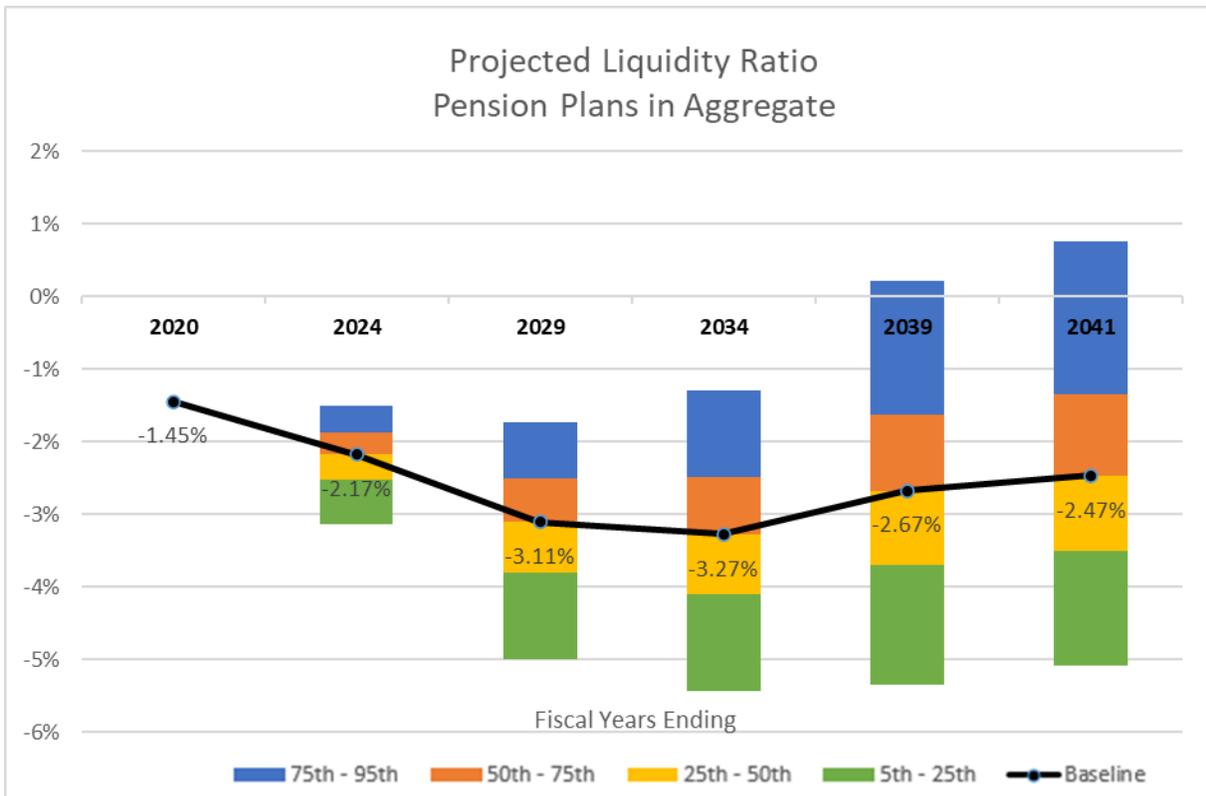
During periods of continued volatility, assets in plans with less liquidity are likely to be sold at a loss and as a result may contribute to decreasing funded ratios. In the U.S., plans have an average of 1% of their target portfolios held in cash and short-term investments to pay ongoing expenses, such as benefit payments and administrative costs. A liquidity-to-assets ratio can be useful in determining the liquidity risk, if any, of a pension plan.

$$\text{Liquidity to Assets Ratio} = \frac{\text{Cash} + \text{Contributions} - \text{Benefit Payments \& Expenses}}{\text{Market Value of Assets}}$$

A negative liquidity-to-assets ratio indicates the pension plan requires additional money to maintain operations and make all benefit payments. The further the ratio is below zero, the higher the percentage of assets that may have to be converted to cash. In a typical year, cash flows may be supplemented by realizing positive investment returns.

Currently VRS is targeting 1.0% of the portfolio to be held in cash and short-term investments to pay ongoing expenses. As of June 30, 2020, the liquidity to asset ratio for all VRS pension plans in aggregate was -1.45%. This means that in addition to the cash allocation of 1% of assets and member and employer contributions, an investment return of approximately 1.45% is required to generate enough funds to pay benefits and expenses without requiring further liquidation of investments. Exhibit 20 below shows the expected liquidity ratio for all VRS plans in aggregate over the next 30 years. Similar to the cash flow exhibits above, the liquidity ratios show increased reliance on investment returns over the next 10 to 15 years if contributions remain level and benefit payments continue to increase. Similar to what we see with the cash flow projections in Exhibits 19 and 20 above, by 2034 more reliance on investment returns will be required to keep the fund cash flow neutral due to an increasing number of benefit payments being paid. This equates to a liquidity-to-asset ratio of -3.27% in 2034 before moderating as the asset base grows.

Exhibit 21



## Contribution Risk

Following the Great Recession and subsequent economic fallout, there was renewed focus by rating and oversight agencies on financial reporting and funding of employer benefit plans. Except for in limited cases, political subdivision plans are required by statute to contribute the full Board certified actuarially determined contribution rate. This has historically kept the political subdivision plans much better funded than the statewide plans. The State committed to fully funding the actuarial required contributions for Statewide plans and demonstrated that commitment by achieving full funding of contributions earlier than required in the transition plan codified in § 51.1-145 of the *Code of Virginia* which was part of the pension reform efforts in 2012. This cultural shift in full funding of actuarial required rates along with the additional focus provided by rating and oversight committees has helped to improve funding levels for benefit plans since the last recession.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Even with the positive changes that have been made it is necessary, given the current economic environment, to discuss contribution risk. Contribution risk is the possibility that actual future contributions deviate from what was expected. This type of risk is typically linked to investment performance, assumption changes, or changes in plan design that unexpectedly impact future contribution rates. The COVID-19 crisis, the impact of which on state and local economies has varied, has highlighted another facet of contribution risk, the risk that the funding source is disrupted or impacted, causing the possibility of underfunded rates, which would lead to higher future costs for the plans.

While economic shocks are able to be smoothed into the employer contribution rates to manage volatility, budget impacts that may persist due to the pandemic, may continue for several years. While the Commonwealth's current revenue picture is positive, the reduced revenue that the State and local employers could face due to the pandemic could potentially continue to be a contributing factor to the risk of underfunding.

## **Longevity Risk**

Longevity risk is a term used to describe the instance in which life expectancies are longer than what was assumed. In defined benefit plans, longevity risk is the risk that members live for longer than is currently expected. This can result in pensions being paid for longer than expected, thus costing plans more money.

Longevity risk is likely to be one of the most significant risks for most plans and has become increasingly important in assessing the overall risk profile as discount rates have fallen and liabilities have increased.

Mortality assumptions used for the valuation of pension benefits can have a large impact on the calculation of pension liabilities, so the selection of appropriate mortality tables is important.

There are two basic types of mortality tables - static mortality tables and generational mortality tables. Static or 'period' tables contain probabilities of death for each age, typically separately for men and women. These tables are relatively easy to construct and for actuaries to work with. The downside with this approach is that, as life expectancy continues to improve, these tables can quickly become out of date and may need to be updated on a regular basis. Historically, VRS has used static mortality tables with a margin approach which essentially adjusted expected mortality down by 10-12%

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

to anticipate mortality improvement. This approach was predominantly used amongst public pension plans until recent years.

Generational tables are more sophisticated and include assumptions with regard to current and expected future rates of improvements in mortality. Such tables are more difficult to construct, but technology today can assist in the production of these more complex models. The use of generational mortality tables has become more prevalent in recent years in developing pension liabilities. In addition, since mortality improvements are built into the tables, future adjustments may not need to be made as frequently as would be necessary with a static mortality table.

Following the 2021 quadrennial experience study, the VRS Board moved from a static table based on Society of Actuaries RP-2014 mortality table adjusted for margin and based on a head-count weighted basis to a Society of Actuaries public sector mortality table PUB-2010 using a generational mortality approach and a benefits-weighted basis. The benefits-weighted basis weights the age at death of retirees with larger benefits more than the age at death of retirees with smaller benefits. For the VRS population this effectively created longer life expectancies than using a head-count weighted basis.

Incorporating generational mortality into VRS assumptions increased total liabilities of all pension plans approximately 2.8%, or \$2.9 billion. Below is a breakdown by plan of impacts to actuarial accrued liability related to the change in mortality tables:

Exhibit 22

## Entry Age Accrued Liability ( \$'s Billions)

Plan	2020 Valuation RP-2014 Static Mortality Table	Switch to Pub2010 Mortality Table with Modified MP-2020 Amt Wtd	Percentage Increase in Accrued Liability	Dollar Increase in Accrued Liability
State	\$25.75	\$26.40	2.51%	\$0.65
Teachers	\$50.84	\$51.80	1.90%	\$0.96
SPORS	\$1.21	\$1.25	3.90%	\$0.05
VaLORS	\$2.26	\$2.33	3.14%	\$0.07
JRS	\$0.68	\$0.75	10.18%	\$0.07
Political Subdivisions in Aggregate	\$25.31	\$26.46	4.55%	\$1.15
Total Pension Liabilities	\$106.04	\$108.99	2.78%	\$2.95

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

The exhibit below highlights the assumed increase in life expectancy associated with the new mortality tables adopted by the VRS Board in April 2021.

Exhibit 23

LIFE EXPECTANCY STATE				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
55	83.06	85.07	85.96	87.08
65	84.91	86.06	87.15	87.76
75	87.53	88.04	89.08	89.24

LIFE EXPECTANCY TEACHERS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
55	84.95	86.26	87.87	88.99
65	86.20	86.77	88.70	89.41
75	88.10	88.32	90.19	90.44

HAZARDOUS DUTY				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
55	82.34	84.13	83.61	83.65
65	84.13	84.92	85.10	84.64
75	86.66	87.03	87.60	86.86

JRS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table	Current Mortality Table	Generational Mortality Table
55	83.06	87.34	85.96	90.16
65	84.91	88.18	87.15	90.67
75	87.53	89.83	89.08	91.77

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

In addition to reflecting increases in life expectancy for current members, the new tables also incorporate additional mortality improvements for future generations. The tables below show the life expectancy of members who attain the age 55, 65, and 75 in 2021 as compared to projected life expectancy for members who will attain age 55, 65, or 75 in the year 2041.

Exhibit 24

LIFE EXPECTANCY STATE				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
55	85.07	86.37	87.08	88.26
65	86.06	87.16	87.76	88.76
75	88.04	88.83	89.24	90.01

LIFE EXPECTANCY TEACHERS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
55	86.26	87.41	88.99	90.04
65	86.77	87.79	89.41	90.33
75	88.32	89.08	90.44	91.18

HAZARDOUS DUTY				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
55	84.13	85.41	83.65	84.99
65	84.92	86.02	84.64	85.76
75	87.03	87.81	86.86	87.67

JRS				
Age	MALE		FEMALE	
	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041	Generational Mortality Table 2021	Generational Mortality Table 2041
55	87.34	88.58	90.16	91.24
65	88.18	89.24	90.67	91.62
75	89.83	90.62	91.77	92.53

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

While the new generational mortality tables do not totally alleviate longevity risk, they help to reduce the exposure by anticipating longer lifetimes and incorporating additional funding to potentially pay benefits for longer periods of time.

## **Potential Strategies to Enhance Funding**

VRS continues to support strategies to lower the legacy unfunded liabilities of the plans. While these various techniques could save employers money on future contributions, increasing contributions during a fiscal crisis, even in order to ultimately save money, might not be a practicable or realistic approach. Nevertheless, when revenues and fiscal conditions allow these alternatives may serve to reduce future employer expenditures and as a result are worth discussing here.

A decade of bull markets has shown that investment returns alone will not get rid of the legacy unfunded liabilities, which were in part the result of a failure to fund the certified contribution rates. Recent financial crises such as the Great Recession and impacts of the pandemic in 2020 have shown that plans with greater unfunded liabilities will continue to be more vulnerable to market downturns. This suggests that a dedicated effort to pay down unfunded liabilities on a more accelerated basis may help to cushion any potential uncertainty that could occur with future market downturns.

### *Shorten Period for Amortization of Legacy Unfunded Liability*

Although the current funding policy puts the plans on a path to full funding by 2044, it is important to understand how the legacy unfunded liability is being amortized and how it is expected to change over time.

As discussed above, to keep plan costs level over time, unfunded liabilities are generally amortized using a “level percentage of payroll” method. This method assumes that payroll will increase over time due to both inflation and merit increases, so it aims to collect roughly the same percentage of payroll each year, which should inherently collect larger dollars in later years as payrolls increase. This is essentially a “back-loaded” funding method. This is a common method for funding of public sector plans, though some plans opt to use revenue growth rather than growth of payroll as the basis for the growth rate. The alternative would be to amortize unfunded liabilities as a “level dollar” amount, which would collect the same cash contribution each year similar to a home mortgage. This generally causes “front-loading” of contributions by paying a higher

## FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

percentage of contributions as a percent of payroll early in the amortization period and a smaller percentage towards the end of the amortization period.

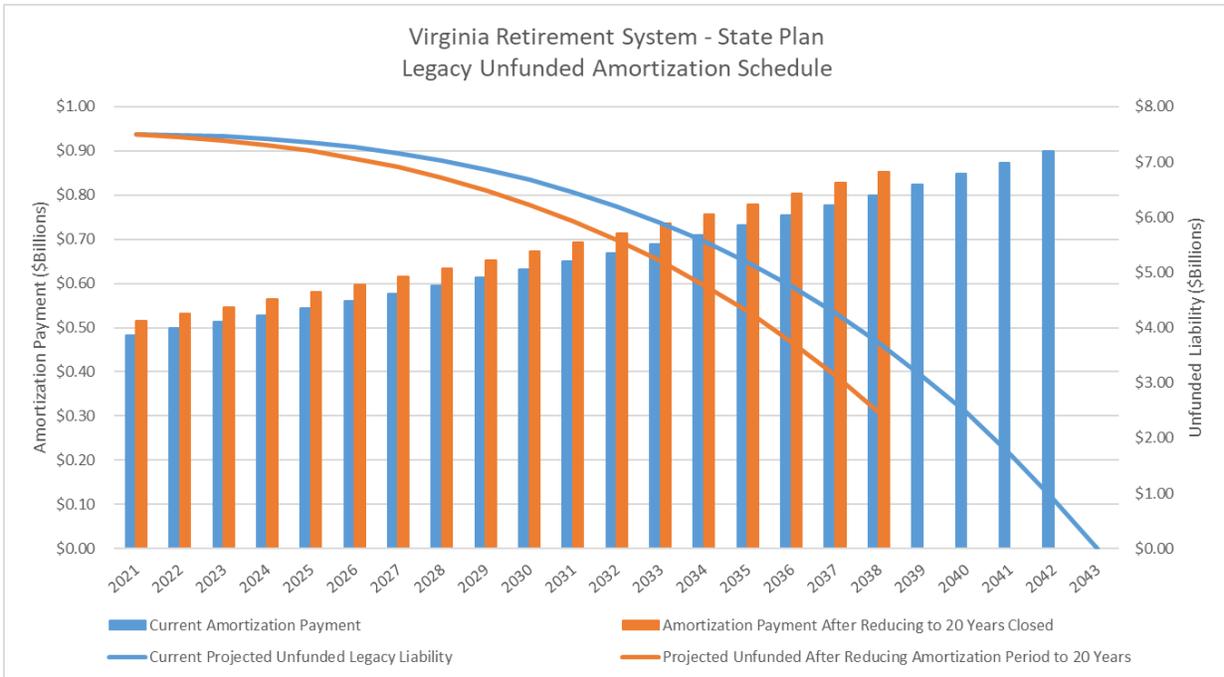
In 2013 when VRS changed its funding policy, one of the changes was to move from open to closed amortization periods to pay down unfunded liabilities. It was decided that all future gains and losses would be amortized over 20-year closed periods. This method would avoid “negative amortization” and also pay down losses more closely related to the working lifetime of members rather than pushing costs beyond their working career. Negative amortization occurs when the amortization payment is set too low to cover the interest payment on the outstanding balance, which results in an increase in the principal balance of the loss.

The legacy unfunded liability established as of 2013 was amortized over a 30-year closed period. This was done in large part in an effort to moderate employer rates, which at the time were not being fully funded by the Governor and General Assembly. Using a shorter amortization period would have increased rates even more steeply than the move to the closed amortization period. One issue with amortizing unfunded liabilities over longer periods of time—such as 30 years—is that during the first nine or 10 years, the interest payments on the unfunded liability will be in excess of the amortization payment, which creates “negative amortization.” This means that the outstanding balance actually increases during the first eight or nine years of amortization as payments go toward interest rather than principal.

As of June 30, 2020, the State plan legacy unfunded liability has 23 years of the original 30 years remaining to be paid, with an outstanding balance of \$7.5 billion. Under the current amortization schedule, \$7.7 billion of interest will be paid over the next 23 years on the \$7.5 billion outstanding balance. To illustrate, as shown in Exhibit 24, adjusting the remaining period for the legacy unfunded liability down to 20 years beginning with the 2021 valuation would avoid any additional negative amortization and save the State approximately \$915 million in interest payments. The shorter amortization period would increase employer rates by approximately 0.73% of covered payroll each year of the remaining amortization period.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

Exhibit 25



Results based on June 30, 2020 actuarial valuation.

Note that any impacts that result in flat or even declining workforce/payroll in the public sector, similar to what was seen after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008/2009 would likely result in increases in amortization payments as a percentage of payroll due to payments to the unfunded liability being less than expected.

### Maintain Current Contribution Rates

Maintaining current contribution levels following years in which the plan experiences actuarial gains could help create a cushion against future actuarial losses while improving the plan funded status. For example, when rates are expected to decrease due to investment gains realized in FY 2021, maintaining the existing contribution rates would serve to bolster the plans and reduce negative amortization payments. This strategy has been implemented by the VRS Board of Trustees for political subdivision plans for both pension and OPEB plans. It allows for alternative funding requirements that can be applied in situations to either improve or strengthen funding levels of political subdivision plans that are “at-risk” or poorly funded as determined by the Plan actuary.

# FUTURE RISK ANALYSIS

## *Limitations on Benefit Enhancements*

Another strategy adopted by the VRS Board of Trustees is to require political subdivision plans to meet specific funding measures in order to make modifications or enhancements to benefits. Plans are required to be at least 75% funded both before and after any plan changes, which could require the employer to make lump sum payments at the time of a plan change in order to maintain the plan funding level. This prevents employers from adding large liabilities to their plans that they may not be able to pay for in future years.

Legislatively mandated benefit expansions, however, must be provided by all employers despite the employer's funded status. In addition, some benefit enhancements can create immediate liabilities. As benefits enhancements are considered, focus should not only be placed on the contribution rates required to fund the benefits, but also the unfunded liabilities generated

# FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

While economic markets rebounded to provide strong returns for fiscal year 2021, COVID-19 continues to create uncertainty in global markets and unpredictable impacts to future market returns.

Changes to assumptions recommended following the 2021 quadrennial experience study, including changing to a generational mortality approach on a benefits-weighted basis, will offset some of the investment gains, but will better position the plan to address longevity risk associated with members living longer in retirement.

As plans mature and assets continue to grow, downside investment risk will have a bigger impact on plan funded status and employer contribution rates.

Opportunities exist to proactively address some of these concerns and to better position the retirement plans to provide the financial stability for current and future members of VRS. Accelerating payback of the legacy unfunded liability has the potential to save billions in future employer contributions while enhancing the funded status of the retirement plans. This could be achieved by:

- Reducing amortization periods for remaining legacy unfunded payments.
- Maintaining current employer contribution rates when positive experience would otherwise allow for a reduction in employer rates.
- Adjusting methodology used to amortize unfunded liabilities.
- Avoiding the expansion of benefits across pension and OPEBs while plans remain underfunded.

## **Next Steps**

- Due to the continued uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 recovery and the corresponding impacts on the economy at large, analysis of future impacts on the VRS fund will continue as new information becomes available.
- VRS will continue to monitor the health of the plans and is committed to providing robust analysis for consideration by the Board and other key stakeholders.

§ 51.1-124.30:1. Adoption of stress testing and reporting policies.

The Virginia Retirement System (VRS) shall adopt a formal policy to:

1. Develop and regularly report sensitivity and stress test analyses. Such analyses and reporting shall include projections of benefit levels, pension costs, liabilities, and debt reduction under various economic and investment scenarios;
2. Improve investment transparency and reporting policy by (i) providing a clear and detailed online statement of investment policy; (ii) including one-year, three-year, five-year, and 10-year investment performance data in quarterly investment reports; (iii) including 20-year and 25-year investment performance data in annual investment reports; (iv) reporting net investment returns on a quarterly basis; and (v) reporting gross investment returns and returns by asset class on an annual basis; and
3. Regularly report investment performance and expenses such as external manager fees, carried interest fees, and investment department expenses for all asset classes, including private equity, public equity, fixed income, credit strategies, real assets, strategic opportunities, and other investments.

2017, c. 639.