

2017 MERS Conference Employee Delegate Summary

First and foremost, thank you to all Ingham County employees for allowing me to represent Ingham County as the employee delegate at the 2017 MERS Retirement Conference in Detroit. It was a very inspiring visit to see all the changes and growth in our state's largest city as it continues to rise from the economic ashes of bankruptcy, Detroit is truly a modern day Phoenix. This opportunity gave me the chance to see as an employee and future retiree just how fluid the idea of "retirement" can be and how much retirement plans and investment goals have changed since I was the employee delegate in 2015. It also allowed me to better understand the big picture goals and long-term plans of MERS. Honestly, the amount of information provided at this Conference was sometimes overwhelming but there were two areas that I would like to touch on briefly.

First is the general overview provided by four members of Governor Snyder's Responsible Retirement Reform Task Force. The mission of this task force is to provide insight to the Governor and the Legislature on ways to address unfunded pension and retiree health care liabilities for local governments in Michigan. Unfunded liabilities and health care legacy costs are a national issue and the fact that this is the first task force of its kind on a statewide level is significant. The recommendations, findings, and the final report that come out of this task force could have implications not only for Michigan but also nationally.

The other area that I would like to touch on is the area of post-employment healthcare benefits. With the rising costs of healthcare for both employees and employers, particularly those related to retirement benefits, I was deeply interested in the seminar on post-retirement healthcare at the conference. This seminar discussed the partnership that MERS has recently created with a retiree healthcare exchange to establish a marketplace for MERS member retirees that would enable them to shop for affordable healthcare for themselves and their families after retirement. During the seminar it became pretty clear what a unique situation we as employees of Ingham County have with quality affordable employment healthcare for ourselves and our families, as well as the availability of post-employment healthcare provided by our employer. I found out during the seminar that roughly 40% of local units of government don't provide employment healthcare benefits and that number rises to around 70% once the employee retires. So, I am excited to see a marketplace like this come to fruition. And it is definitely something that I look forward to sharing more information with county employees as it becomes available. MERS plans to roll out its post-employment healthcare marketplace sometime in 2018.

I walked away from the 2017 MERS Conference with renewed optimism for the future of not only MERS retirement plans and goals for Ingham County but also for

the great city of Detroit. I can see that the growing pains that both MERS and Detroit are going through are merely a transition that will eventually transform both into models that the rest of the country will emulate, and the State of Michigan will appreciate. I think they are both on track to building a brighter future for its members and citizens.

Sheldon Lewis

2017 MERS Conference - Employee Delegate