

Floor Committee #15: Subsidiaries

Subject: WELS Benefit Plans

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 153-156

Report No. 04

We thank God for the Retirement and VEBA Commissions' faithful service supporting workers and ministry. We're especially thankful for the smooth transition from the WELS Pension Plan, which was frozen Dec. 31, 2021, to the new defined contribution plan (Shepherd Plan) and, in particular, the Retirement Program Commission's communication to organizations and their workers during the transition. The commission reports that all calling bodies have joined the Shepherd Plan, and all called workers serving at least half time have Shepherd Plan accounts.

We're thankful for the ongoing efforts of Benefit Plans to "strike the best balance between acceptable costs to calling bodies and meaningful benefits to participants." We note with thanksgiving that there were no VEBA Plan rate increases for 2021 and 2022, that Pension Plan rates have remained unchanged since 2020, and that there was a 12 percent reduction in administration fees paid by Shepherd Plan participants effective July 1, 2023. We are also thankful for enhanced VEBA Plan benefits, including coverage of eligible costs at 100 percent to diagnose COVID-19, coverage of eligible costs for telehealth consultations with health care providers, protection of members from "surprise" balance billing for care obtained at certain out-of-network providers, and the extension of certain timeframes for requesting special enrollment and filing claims.

We encourage Benefits Plans in their planned efforts to engage participants and communicate investment options and planning resources to workers to help workers meet their financial goals for retirement. We encourage all calling bodies to timely report call status changes to WELS so that workers receive the correct contributions. We encourage all calling bodies to participate in the VEBA Plan and offer Plan coverage to all eligible workers.

Pastor Geoff Cortright, chairman

Teacher Michael Henning, secretary