

# The Employees' Retirement System of Alabama

## Investment Policy Statement

Adopted November 24, 2014

Amended March 6, 2015, September 29, 2015, December 17, 2015,  
September 7, 2017, September 27, 2018, December 14, 2021

Effective: December 14, 2021



## Purpose

This Investment Policy Statement (IPS) sets forth the investment policies by which the fund's investments will be managed. This IPS is consistent with and complements related Alabama Statutes and is intended to be binding upon all persons with authority over the investments of the Employee Retirement System of Alabama ("ERS"). Deviation from the IPS is not permitted without explicit written permission, in advance, from the ERS Board of Control ("Board of Control" or "Board"). This IPS shall be effective April 1, 2015.

The Judicial Retirement Fund is a defined benefit plan created by and administered in accordance with Ala. Code §§ 12-18-1, et seq.. Section 12-18-2(a) states in its pertinent part as follows:

"The Judicial Retirement Fund shall be administered by the Secretary-Treasurer of the State Employees' Retirement System under the supervision of the Board of Control of the said State Employees' Retirement System and said board of control shall be the trustee of such fund and shall handle such fund in the same manner and pursuant to the same rules and regulations that it handles funds in the State Employees' Retirement System."

Therefore, the Board of Control is the trustee and responsible for handling such funds in the same manner as ERS. This IPS, therefore, will also apply to the JRF.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### *Board of Control*

The Board of Control, as Trustees, shall carry out its functions solely in the interest of the members and benefit recipients and for the exclusive purpose of providing benefits and defraying reasonable expenses incurred in performing such duties. The Trustees shall act in accordance with the provisions of the laws and with the care, skill, prudence and diligence in light of the circumstances then prevailing that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use in the conduct of an enterprise of a like character and with like aims by diversifying the investments of the ERS so as to minimize the risk of large losses.

Specific responsibilities include:

- Working with the Investment Management Committee to provide oversight of the investment program of the ERS.
- Approving a statement of investment philosophy that sets forth ERS's beliefs on key investment issues.
- Approving an IPS.
- Ensuring asset allocation strategies are in place to achieve the investment goals and objectives of the ERS.
- Reviewing adherence to the investment philosophy of the ERS.

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- Reviewing compliance with, and the continued appropriateness of, the IPS.
- Reviewing the investment performance of the fund, including the performance of all investment classes.
- Elect an investment committee (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(d)).
- Appoint an Investment Advisor (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(e)).

### ***Investment Management Committee***

The Investment Management Committee is responsible for overseeing the ERS investment program. Specific responsibilities include recommending to/advising the Board:

- A written statement of investment philosophy for the fund.
- A written IPS.
- Strategies to achieve the investment goals and objectives of the ERS.
- On any other investment matters and make recommendations for Board action when necessary.
- Keeping minutes of Investment Management Committee meetings and ensure the minutes are made available to Trustees.
- Monitoring all the investment activities of the Investment Committee, Secretary-Treasurer, Staff, Investment Advisor, and Custodian.
- Ensuring the investment reporting policies are designed to provide transparency and aggregate information on target investments regardless of the investment vehicles used.

### ***Investment Committee***

The Investment Committee will:

- Act as agent for its appointing Board of Control (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(d)).
- Consider all investment recommendations made by the Secretary-Treasurer (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(d)).
- Either approve or disapprove the recommended investments in accordance with policies set by the Board (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(d)).
- Confirm by written authorization the approval of all investments, with such authorization to be attached to the invoice for the transaction (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(d)).

### ***Secretary-Treasurer***

The Secretary –Treasurer is elected by the Board of Control and serves as the chief executive officer for the ERS. Ala. Code §§36-27-23(h). Specific responsibilities of the Secretary-Treasurer include:

- Recommending to the Investment Management Committee a written statement of investment philosophy and review that statement with the committee at least every three years.
- Recommending to the Investment Management Committee a written IPS and review that statement with the committee at least annually.
- Recommending to the Investment Management Committee strategies to achieve the investment goals and objectives of ERS.
- Developing, and executing, within the policy parameters approved by the Board, investment strategies for each asset category in which the ERS invests.
- Executing portfolio rebalancing in accordance with the policies of the Board.
- Advising the Board and the Investment Management Committee on any other investment matters and making recommendations for Board or committee action when necessary.
- Reporting to the Board of Control all purchases and sales of investments made by him or her at least once semiannually (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(c)).
- Carrying out the investment policies fixed by the Board of Control (Ala. Code §§26-27-25(c)).
- Examining all offers of investments made to the funds (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(c)).
- Initiating inquiries as to available investments for the funds (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(c)).
- Reviewing periodically the investment quality and desirability of retention of investments held (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(c)).
- Making purchases and sales of investments as he or she shall deem to be to the best interests of the fund and in accordance with policies set by the Board, and as the Investment Committee shall approve (Ala. Code §§36-27-25(c)).

### *Custodian*

The Custodian holds directly, through its agents, its sub-custodians, or designated clearing systems, assets as designated by the Board. The Custodian is accountable for registration of those designated assets in good delivery form, collection of income generated by those assets, and any corporate action notification. The Custodian is responsible for delivery and receipt of securities of the aforementioned transactions. The Custodian is required to provide online records and reports, performance reporting, accounting reports and other services included by contract. The Board may opt to designate other duties to the Custodian.

### *Investment Advisor*

The Investment Advisor may be appointed and employed by the Board of Control to act as a consultant to the Secretary-Treasurer in the purchase, sale, and review of the ERS's investments to the extent the Board may designate. The Investment Advisor must be a bank having principal office in the State of Alabama, must have capital, surplus and undivided profits of not less than \$300 million, and must have an organized investment department. Specific responsibilities of the Investment Advisor include:

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- Assist the Secretary-Treasurer with the development of quarterly strategies for investments.
- Confirm weekly list of investment activities.
- Meet at least quarterly with the Secretary-Treasurer and Board of Control members.

## Investment Goals and Objectives

The function of the ERS is to provide present and future retirement or survivor benefits for its members. This objective requires the prudent assumption of investment risk in seeking to maximize long-term investment returns while incorporating the fund's liability requirements. The future investment performance of the fund directly affects its future financial strength. However, the greater the expected return of the strategic asset allocation policy, the higher the risk, and thus the greater the volatility of expected returns. With this greater volatility, the volatility of the surplus (deficit) of the plan may also be greater. The optimal balancing of these return and risk considerations will be considered in the context of the fund's short-term and long-term benefit obligations.

## Investment Philosophy

The investment philosophy for the ERS is determined with careful consideration of its primary fund purpose, fiduciary obligations, statutory requirements, actuarial assumptions, funding policy, liquidity needs, income sources, benefit obligations and other general business conditions. The investment philosophy embraces the following:

- Strategic asset allocation is the most significant factor influencing long-term investment performance and asset volatility. The asset allocation targets, determined by the Board of Control, will be adhered to through a clearly defined rebalancing program.
- In controlling the risk level that is appropriate for the fund, the Board will diversify the assets of the fund among various asset classes as the Board may from time to time adopt as appropriate asset classes. The specific asset classes to be used will be set in conjunction with the strategic asset allocation adopted from time to time by the Board. The Board will diversify investment assets within asset classes to avoid concentrations.
- The fund's liabilities are long term and the investment strategy will therefore be long term in nature. Strategic decisions will prevail in determining asset allocation rather than tactical or short-term market timing decisions.
- The asset allocation policy will be reexamined every three years to ensure its appropriateness to the then prevailing liability considerations.
- Market-related risk and non-market related risk investments will be utilized. Market related risk refers to risk systematic to a market or risk embedded in the strategic asset allocation policy. Non-market risk refers to risk derived from active management or tactical decisions. Market-related risks are expected to produce returns proportional to the level of those risks over long periods of time as a natural feature of reasonably efficient capital markets; non-market related risks may produce additional returns when capitalized upon through skilled

active management in the presence of some degree of market inefficiency. As a long-term investor, the ERS will invest across a wide spectrum of market-related risk investments, categorized in asset classes, in a prudent manner consistent with the strategic asset allocation policy referred to above.

- Index funds can be a desirable way of obtaining market-related risk exposure to asset classes.
- Non-market-related risks, also known as active management risk, may be expected to add value over index funds with comparable benchmarks, under appropriate conditions, and can be employed by the fund with controls in place which are appropriate to the particular investment.
- Also ERS recognizes that a stronger Alabama equates to a stronger Employee Retirement System, and as such, investments in Alabama businesses are encouraged to the extent the investment return meets the criteria delineated by this policy statement. Any Alabama investment must be forecast to have a return comparable to other investments in the same asset class. The forecast and the accompanying analysis must be presented to the Investment Committee and Investment Management Committee prior to making the investment.

## Strategic Asset Allocation Policy

The **ERS** current target asset allocation and ranges are specified below.

Asset Class	JRF Target Allocation	ERS Target Allocation	Strategic Range
Domestic Equity	55%	45%	30%-60%
International Equity	15%	15%	10%-25%
Fixed Income	22%	15%	10%-40%
Alternative Investments	1%	10%	0%-15%
Real Estate	2%	10%	0%-15%
Short-term investments	5%	5%	1%-10%

The strategic asset allocation policy will be periodically reviewed, as described under “Investment Philosophy” and “Roles and Responsibilities.”

## Rebalancing Policy

The purpose of the rebalancing policy is to ensure the adherence to the strategic allocation plan. Unexpected changes in market values may, on occasion, cause the actual asset allocation to fall outside of the allowable ranges. This policy applies to all asset classes in which the ERS invests and requires

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Investment Management Staff (“Staff”) to implement rebalancing trades if, as of any quarter end, the allocation to any asset class is outside the allowable ranges. The Board recognizes, however, the inherent difficulty in managing the allocations to illiquid asset classes.

As such, with respect to ERS’s investments in illiquid asset classes (alternative investments and real estate), the Board expects the allocations to these areas to be managed as close as practical to the policy targets. As of any quarter-end, the Board expects Staff to report illiquid asset class allocations that fall outside the prescribed ranges. In addition, the Board expects Staff to provide an implementation recommendation to bring the fund’s allocation to these areas back within the allowable ranges. The Staff will provide annually to the Investment Management Committee a schedule for valuations on such assets.

Managing the allocations to the marketable asset classes involves a risk reduction tradeoff with increased transaction costs. As such, the Board expects Staff to implement this policy in a manner that seeks to minimize the impact of transaction costs. In particular, the Board expects Staff to use cash contributions and cash needs to move the fund’s asset allocation as close as practical to the policy targets.

When markets move such that the fund’s normal cash flows are insufficient to maintain the fund’s actual asset allocation within the permissible ranges as of any quarter end, the Board expects Staff to implement the necessary transactions to bring the fund’s allocation back to within the allowable ranges. Before a rebalancing transaction is implemented, the Board expects Staff to identify those portfolios that are likely to have the lowest cost of trading. Absent any asset class structure considerations, the Board expects these low trading cost portfolios to be utilized more frequently to implement required total fund rebalancing.

## **Eligible Asset Categories**

The Board is responsible for approving asset categories in which the fund will invest. Listed below are the asset categories in which ERS currently invests along with a discussion of market efficiency in each category.

The efficiency of markets is relevant to expected return opportunities. Highly efficient markets provide less opportunity to add value above market returns. Highly inefficient markets provide more opportunity to add return above what is available by the market. This above market return expectation can be referred to as alpha. Market return can be referred to as beta.

### ***Domestic Equities***

Investing in the domestic equity market is a way to participate in one of the largest and most diverse economies in the world through ownership of the companies that make up the economy of the United States. Investment theory and history suggest that the domestic equity markets provide long-term price appreciation in an amount that tends to mirror the overall growth in the economy. In addition,

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stocks have historically provided a return that served as an effective hedge relative to inflation (i.e., the historical return of stocks has been in excess of the rate of inflation).

It is expected that the ERS will have exposure to all segments of the domestic equity market including but not limited to growth and value stocks of large to small capitalization companies. The domestic equity market is considered by many to be one of the most efficient capital markets in the world. The availability of public information regarding the future prospects of individual companies combined with the numerous market participants rendering assessments of the information contribute to this market's efficiency. With this in mind, a large portion of the domestic equity portfolio will be managed through passive index funds. A portion of the portfolio will be utilized to add alpha relative to the benchmarks. While the market is very efficient, neither it nor any other market is perfectly efficient. When appropriate skill is available, it may be possible to successfully use active management techniques to improve upon benchmark returns, with acceptable levels of risk.

### ***International Equities***

The international equity markets are an increasingly larger share of the investment opportunity set. In addition, because international company stocks tend to react to local as well as global influences, the fluctuations in the returns of international equity markets are only partially related to the movements in the domestic equity market. Further, capital market theory suggests that we should be fully diversified in a global, not just in a local sense.

### ***Fixed Income***

Bonds provide a source of diversification relative to an equity-oriented portfolio. The rate of return volatility (investment risk) of fixed income securities is substantially lower than the volatility of equities. In addition, there are significant differences in the pattern of returns between stock and bond investments. When combined with equity securities, a fixed income allocation can serve to reduce the overall risk of the portfolio without materially sacrificing return potential.

The fixed income asset class is perhaps the most diverse capital market. Securities include government, mortgage-backed and corporate bonds of U.S. and non-U.S. issuers. It also includes bonds issued by high quality as well as low quality companies and countries. The fixed income market may be more efficient than once believed. However, fixed income can experience less efficiency at times and in certain segments such as lower quality bonds. It is expected that the fixed income portfolio will make use of both active and passive investment mandates and will include allocations to all major segments of the fixed income market.

### ***Short-term Investments***

Short-term investments are an integral part of a public pension portfolio, primarily as a tool of principal preservation and as a provider of liquidity. Eligible securities within this asset class include but are not limited to, U.S. treasury bills, notes and bonds with maturities of one year or less, corporate



debt obligations (primarily commercial paper), short-dated agency and mortgage backed debt with government backed principal and interest payments, various types of bank paper including time deposits, repurchase agreements as well as money market funds. Also included is any money held in the STIF (short-term investment fund) account at the custody bank of the RSA, State Street Corporation.

### ***Alternative Investments***

The alternative investment asset class can encompass many different and distinct asset categories. These types of investments exhibit high levels of risk, with an expectation for high rates of investment returns. Many of these investments also exhibit a high level of correlation with the publicly-traded equity markets.

The alternative investment asset class is considered highly inefficient, as the lack of publicly available company and pricing information suggest active management is critical in this asset class. The primary benefit afforded investors in this asset class is the expectation of generating high levels of investment returns, as well as hedging instruments for risk controls.

Examples of such investments are venture capital partnerships, private equity, hedge funds, leveraged buy-out funds, private debt, and direct ownership of individual assets such as oil and gas partnerships. These investments shall only be entered into after due diligence and with approval by both the Investment Committee and the Investment Management Committee or by the Board. No final commitment shall be made until all the forgoing is met. Subsequent investments in a previously approved investment do not require additional specific approvals by the Investment Committee and the Investment Management Committee or the Board, unless there has been a material adverse change in the investment.

ERS may not engage an investment manager or invest in a fund, partnership, or other entity if the terms of the engagement or investment do not preclude an investment result that is contrary to the Investment Policy Statement.

ERS may not engage an investment manager or invest in a fund unless the investment-management or subscription agreement includes a representation, warranty, and covenant confirming the absence of any compensation (before, during, or after the agreement) to a solicitor, placement agent, lobbyist, or other intermediary except as fully disclosed in a writing attached to and made a part of the agreement.

### ***Real Estate***

Real estate investments can serve as a diversifier of a stock and bond portfolio. While the factors that influence real estate returns may also influence the returns of stock and bond portfolios, these factors impact real estate in a different manner than the other asset classes. This suggests that the return

patterns of real estate have a lower correlation to other asset classes, providing a diversification benefit when combined with stocks and bonds.

## **Risk Controls and Procedures**

- The fund is to be broadly diversified across and within asset classes to limit the volatility of the total fund investment returns and to limit the impact of large losses on individual investments of the fund.
- Individual portfolios will be managed according to written investment guidelines that are approved by the Staff. These guidelines are intended to ensure that the portfolio meets its objective and operates within acceptable risk parameters.
- A process will be established by which compliance with all elements of the IPS and portfolio guidelines are measured and monitored, with compliance exceptions being reported to the Investment Management Committee and the Board.
- The Investment Advisor will work with the Staff to develop a quarterly strategy for investments, which will be disseminated to the Board, as it is prepared each quarter.
- The Investment Committee shall approve all investments made within the IPS. The Investment Committee, in its approval, is considered to be signing for the Board of Control. If any purchase or sale is questioned by two members of the Investment Committee as to whether it is within policy, the Board shall decide and no purchase or sale shall take place until all parties are in clear agreement that said action is or is not covered by policy.
- Each week, the Secretary-Treasurer will send to the Investment Advisor the list of actual activities for written confirmation, which will then be distributed to the Board of Control members upon receipt.
- All investment security purchases will be documented with an individual worksheet setting out the reason for the purchase, rating, market history and other general data relevant to the decision making process.
- An annual survey will be made of all fixed income investments held with emphasis on credit quality. A holding that has been downgraded in rating will be examined as to the reason for the downgrade and a determination should be made as to whether the security should remain in the portfolio.
- The rules of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the general policies of the Board of Control, and the Alabama Ethics Commission shall govern the ethical conduct of employees. The Investment Management Staff will provide the Alabama Ethics Commission with a quarterly report of all purchases and sales of any and all securities for personal accounts occurring within each reported quarter.
- All Alternative Investments will be documented with a comprehensive financial analysis setting out the reasons for the investment and showing the projected return on investment.

## **Performance Measurement**

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The investment objective of the ERS total fund is to earn the rate of return of the Total Plan Policy Portfolio. A Policy Portfolio is a passive representation of the specific asset allocation strategy pursued and is the most objective performance evaluation metric. The Total Plan Policy Portfolio weights each individual portfolio and its return versus the actual relative index returns. This process accounts for asset allocation shifts within and between any asset classes.

### ***Total Plan Benchmark***

The Total Plan Benchmark is calculated monthly. It is a weighted average of the asset classes and their corresponding benchmarks. The weights are calculated using the beginning market values. The asset class benchmarks are listed in the table below.

<b>Domestic Equity</b>	<b>Custom Benchmark</b>	<b>(see description below)</b>
<b>International Equity</b>	MSCI EAFE Net & Emerging Markets Net	
<b>Domestic Fixed Income</b>	Custom Benchmark	(see description below)
<b>International Fixed Income</b>	WGBI Non-US	Currently, there are no International Fixed Income portfolios in the plan.
<b>Cash</b>	ML 90-Day T-Bill	
<b>Alternative Investments</b>	-If an equity investment, the Russell 2000 +3%  -If a debt investment, the Bloomberg Capital Agency plus 3%.	
<b>Real Estate</b>	NCREIF NPI	-Privately held US- based commercial Real Estate properties.  -Most commonly used.  -Often use NPI + 1-3% to compensate for higher risk and expected returns of funds that use leverage.

### ***Domestic Equity Benchmark***

The Domestic Equity Benchmark is calculated monthly. It is a weighted average of the domestic equity portfolios and their corresponding benchmarks. The weights are calculated using the beginning markets' values. The portfolio benchmarks are listed in the table below:

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<b>Core Fund</b>	<b>S&amp;P 500</b>
<b>S&amp;P 500 Fund</b>	S&P 500
<b>MidCap Active Fund (SSF)</b>	S&P 400 MidCap
<b>S&amp;P MidCap Index</b>	S&P 400 MidCap
<b>S&amp;P SmallCap Index</b>	S&P 600 SmallCap
<b>SmallCap Active Fund</b>	S&P 600 SmallCap
<b>LargeCap Policy Fund</b>	S&P 500
<b>LargeCap Value Fund</b>	S&P 500

### ***Fixed Income Benchmark***

The Fixed Income Benchmark is calculated monthly. It is a weighted average of the Fixed Income sectors and their corresponding benchmarks. The weights are calculated using the beginning markets' values. The sector benchmarks are listed in the table below:

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Bloomberg Capital Agency</b>
<b>Asset Backed</b>	Bloomberg Capital ABS Index
<b>CMO</b>	Bloomberg Capital MTGE
<b>Corporate</b>	Bloomberg Capital Corp
<b>Municipal</b>	N/A
<b>Mortgage Pass-Through</b>	Bloomberg Capital MTGE
<b>Private Placement</b>	N/A
<b>US Treasury</b>	Bloomberg Capital Treasury
<b>Yankee - Agency</b>	Bloomberg Capital Agency
<b>Yankee – Other Yankee</b>	Bloomberg Capital Corp