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What's Missing From Your Social Security Check? About \$223, According to New Analysis From The Senior Citizens League

(Washington, DC) – A new analysis from [The Senior Citizens League](http://www.SeniorsLeague.org) (TSCL) indicates that Social Security checks in 2019 are as much as 18 percent lower due to the impact of extremely low COLAs over the past ten years. From 2000 to 2010, COLAs routinely averaged 3 percent annually. People who have been receiving Social Security benefits since 2009, have only seen a COLA higher than 2.8 percent one time (in 2012).

The Social Security Administration announced today that the 2020 COLA will be just 1.6 percent, continuing the worrisome trend in which COLAs have averaged just 1.4 percent from 2000 to 2010. “Adequate COLAs are critical to retirement security,” says Mary Johnson, a Social Security policy analyst for The Senior Citizens League. “Social Security is one of the only types of retirement income that provides this essential protection against rising costs. “When a retiree’s costs rise faster than their COLA, the buying power of Social Security benefits erodes, leaving people with a benefit that doesn’t go as far as it did when they first retired,” Johnson notes. According to research by Johnson, Social Security benefits have lost 33 percent of buying power since 2000.

In 2010, 2011, and 2016 there was no COLA payable at all and, in 2017, the COLA was just 0.03 percent. Likewise, in 2018, the COLA was 2 percent, but rising Part B premiums consumed the entire increase for roughly half of all beneficiaries.

COLAs act much like interest rates on savings. Low COLAs mean Social Security benefits grow more slowly in retirement. This occurs even though many costs experienced by retirees, such as out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs — may grow several times as fast. “People who have been retired for 10 years or longer have absorbed the full financial blow of low COLAs,” Johnson says. Johnson’s analysis found that, over a ten-year period, average Social Security benefits of \$1,075 per month in 2009 lost a total of \$15,258 in financial growth from 2010 to 2019 when compared to the previous decade when COLAs averaged 3 percent. By the end of that 10-year period, average benefits were \$223 per month lower than they would have been had inflation averaged the more typical 3 percent.

The Senior Citizens League supports legislation that would require a minimum COLA of no less than 3 percent, even in years when inflation falls below that amount. “Strengthening the COLA,” Johnson says, “would help slow the drain of retirement savings and help keep older Americans out of poverty.” To learn more, visit www.SeniorsLeague.org.

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With 1.2 million supporters, The Senior Citizens League is one of the nation's largest nonpartisan seniors' groups. Its mission is to promote and assist members and supporters, to educate and alert senior citizens about their rights and freedoms as U.S. Citizens, and to protect and defend the benefits senior citizens have earned and paid for. The Senior Citizens League is a proud affiliate of [The Retired Enlisted Association](#). Visit www.SeniorsLeague.org for more information.