

For Immediate Release – September 11, 2025

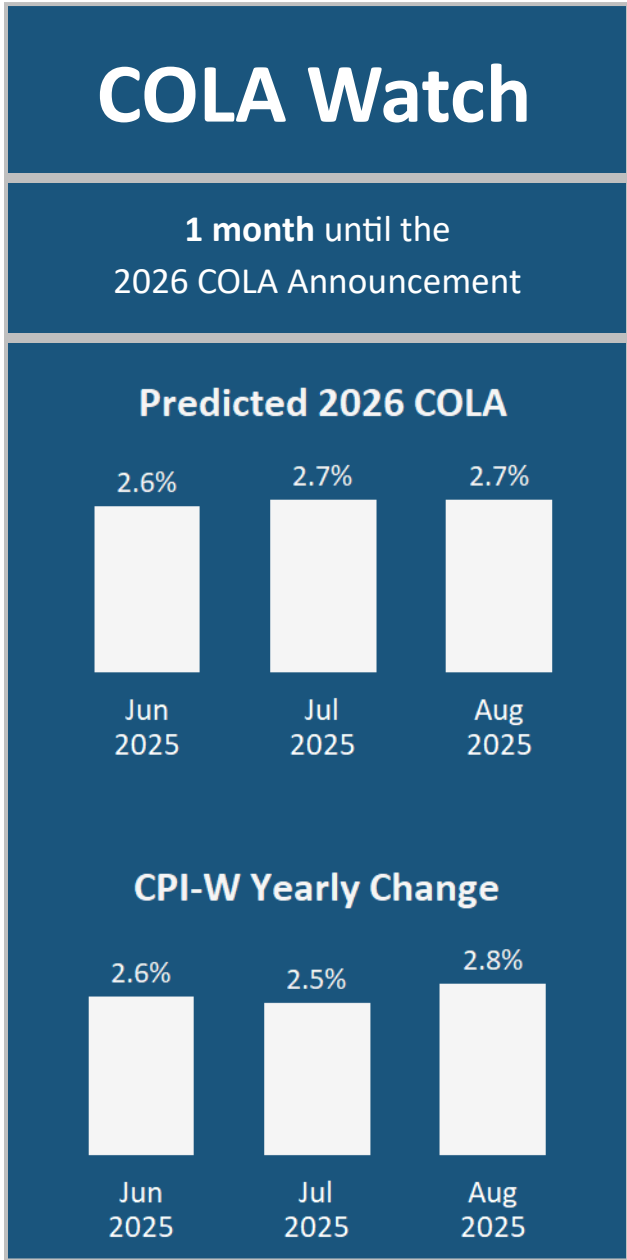
**Expected COLA for 2026 Remains at 2.7% As Social Security Prepares to Stop Mailing Paper Checks**

TSCL’s model predicts that the 2026 Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) will be 2.7 percent when announced on October 15<sup>th</sup>. That’s the same as last month’s prediction of 2.7 percent. It would raise the average monthly benefit for retired workers by \$54, from \$2,008 to \$2,062.

**A COLA of 2.7 percent would be higher than 2025’s COLA of 2.5 percent but lower than the 2024 COLA of 3.2 percent.** Over the last 20 years, the COLA has averaged 2.6 percent.

**The final COLA depends on next month’s CPI release.** The COLA is calculated by taking the average annual inflation, as measured by the CPI-W, for July, August, and September. The CPI-W for July was 2.5 percent. The CPI-W for August, announced today, was 2.8 percent.

**Some Americans will see a change in how they receive their Social Security payments as early as this month.** The Social Security Administration is set to stop mailing paper checks on September 30<sup>th</sup>, following a March 2025 executive order. Nearly 400,000 beneficiaries still receive paper checks, according to the SSA.



## Key Insights:

- **Inflation is substantially higher than our model predicted at the beginning of the year.** In January 2025, our model predicted that inflation would cool, and the COLA would come in at 2.1 percent. Instead, the prediction steadily ticked upward throughout the year as the Trump administration implemented economic policy changes, including aggressive tariff policies that [some experts say](#) have the potential to increase inflation.
- **The 2026 COLA will likely be about average from a historical standpoint.** If it comes in at its projected figure of 2.7 percent, the 2026 COLA would be 0.1 percentage points higher than the 2.6 percent average for the last 20 years. What is the lowest COLA of the last 20 years? It's a tie between 2010 and 2011, which had COLAs of 0.0 percent. The highest? The 8.7 percent COLA was implemented in 2023.
- **It's critical for seniors who rely on paper Social Security checks to prepare for the upcoming change in how payments are delivered.** The Social Security Administration will stop mailing paper checks to beneficiaries on September 30th. The Treasury Department has published instructions to help beneficiaries who will be affected set up bank accounts that can accept electronic deposits. However, outreach to the nearly 400,000 affected Americans will be critical to the change's success.

## TSCL Executive Director Shannon Benton says...

- “Seniors across America are holding their breath as we wait for the official COLA announcement in October. Our research shows that about 39 percent of seniors depend on their benefits for all their income, so the COLA announcement has a direct effect on their quality of life.”
- “Many seniors believe inflation is much higher than the COLA estimates. For example, TSCL’s estimates that about 80 percent of seniors believed inflation in 2024 was substantially higher than the 2.5 percent COLA implemented to make up for it at the beginning of 2025.”
- “While TSCL supports the administration’s motives for eliminating paper Social Security checks—such as reducing fraud and theft, removing delays, and saving on costs—we’ll be watching when it comes to implementation: How effective will it be

at communicating this change, so affected seniors won't have their benefits interrupted?"

### **About TSCL:**

The Senior Citizens League (TSCL) is one of the nation's largest nonpartisan seniors' groups. Established in 1992 as a special project of The Retired Enlisted Association, our mission is to promote and assist our members and supporters, educate and alert senior citizens about their rights and freedoms as U.S. citizens, and protect and defend the benefits seniors have earned and paid for. TSCL consists of vocally active senior citizens concerned about the protection of their Social Security, Medicare, and veteran or military retiree benefits. To learn more, visit <https://seniorsleague.org/about-us/>.

### **About the TSCL COLA Model:**

TSCL issues a new prediction of the next COLA for Social Security each month using our statistical model. The model incorporates the Consumer Price Index, the Federal Reserve interest rate, and the national unemployment rate to make its predictions. The model's predictions update throughout the year, adjusting in response to economic conditions. For additional information about the model, contact Alex Moore, TSCL's statistician, at [amoore@tsclhq.org](mailto:amoore@tsclhq.org).

We released a new version of the model, v1.2, in January 2025. The new version updates the model's use of dates, processing data according to the federal fiscal year instead of the calendar year. The new model also reduces each prediction's reliance on previous predictions made throughout the federal fiscal year.

### **Contact Information:**

- **Shannon Benton**, Executive Director: [sbenton@tsclhq.org](mailto:sbenton@tsclhq.org); 703-548-5568
- **Alex Moore**, Statistician: [amoore@tsclhq.org](mailto:amoore@tsclhq.org); 571-374-2658