

# Management Instruction

## Wounded Warriors Leave

This management instruction sets forth the policy guidelines and standard procedures for administering Wounded Warriors Leave.

## Policy Guidelines

### Wounded Warriors Leave

The Postal Service™ supports the employment of U.S. military veterans who have chosen to commence or resume a civilian career with the Postal Service following their military service. Consistent with the requirements of the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015, the Postal Service allows any employee who meets the eligibility requirements to take a specifically designated type of leave, without loss or reduction in pay, for undergoing medical treatment for a service-related disability.

The Postal Service also recognizes the value that veterans add to the workforce. Consequently, it has determined that is both appropriate and desirable for the Postal Service to grant additional amounts of leave for the purpose of medical treatment as expressed in the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015. Therefore, in addition to the statutorily mandated leave, the Postal Service grants additional Wounded Warriors Leave as described herein.

### Definitions

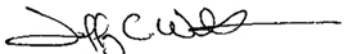
*Wounded Warriors Leave* is an authorized absence from the Postal Service to undergo medical treatment for a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more. It is a separate leave category, distinct from sick leave.

*Treatment* is an in-person visit to a health care provider, as specified in Section 513.364 of the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*, and includes the course of action prescribed by a health care provider. Treatment includes but is not limited to examination for and evaluations of the health condition that has caused the disability rating.

*Health Care Provider* is the employee’s attending physician or other attending practitioner as recognized by ELM 515.2.

*Leave Year* means the period beginning on the first day of the first pay period of the calendar year, concluding with the last day of the last pay period of the calendar year. It is the period during which an employee may use Wounded Warriors Leave.

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## CONTENTS

<b>Policy Guidelines</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Wounded Warriors Leave .....	1
Definitions .....	1
<b>Eligibility</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Eligible Employees.....	2
Employees with Pending Disability Determinations.....	2
Losing the Disability Rating .....	2
<b>Accrual and Crediting</b> .....	<b>2</b>
General .....	2
Initial Eligibility .....	2
Additional Eligibility.....	2
Carryover .....	3
Separation .....	3
<b>Requests for Wounded Warriors Leave</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Foreseeable Leave.....	3
Unforeseeable Leave .....	3
Approval or Disapproval .....	3
Verification .....	3
<b>Charging Wounded Warriors Leave</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Integration with Other Leave Policies</b> .....	<b>4</b>
General .....	4
Integration with Family and Medical Leave Act .....	4

# Eligibility

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## **Eligible Employees**

All employees who have a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more are eligible for Wounded Warriors Leave.

## **Employees with Pending Disability Determinations**

Otherwise eligible employees with pending disability determinations who at any time during any Leave Year receive a 30 percent or more disability rating will be eligible for leave retroactively to the first day of that current Leave Year. Any leave without pay (LWOP) or leave used while the determination is pending will be reimbursed and replaced with Wounded Warriors Leave, as appropriate, up to the maximum number of hours allowed. Wounded Warriors Leave may be retroactively applied for only the most current Leave Year and for no more than 104 hours.

## **Losing the Disability Rating**

If an employee's service-connected disability rating is decreased to below 30 percent or discontinued during any Leave Year, then the employee no longer has a qualifying service-connected disability. The employee must notify the HR Shared Service Center of the effective date of the change in the disability rating. The employee is no longer eligible for Wounded Warriors Leave as of the effective date of the rating change.

# Accrual and Crediting

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## **General**

It is the employee's responsibility to notify the Postal Service of his or her eligibility before requesting Wounded Warriors Leave. Employees must provide documentation to the HR Shared Service Center from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs certifying that the employee has the requisite level of service-connected disability.

## **Initial Eligibility**

Newly hired eligible employees or those returning to the Postal Service will be credited with 104 hours of Wounded Warriors Leave following the Postal Service's receipt of documentation supporting the employee's eligibility. Wounded Warriors Leave will be available for use retroactively to the first day of their enter-on-duty date, or the current Leave Year, whichever is later, for use through the end of the Leave Year.

## **Additional Eligibility**

Eligible employees will be credited with 104 hours of Wounded Warriors Leave on the first day of each Leave Year, and the leave is available for use until the last day of the Leave Year.

## **Carryover**

Wounded Warriors Leave must be used during the Leave Year in which it is credited and will not be carried over. No employee may accrue more than 104 hours of Wounded Warriors Leave during any Leave Year.

## **Separation**

If the employee leaves the Postal Service at any time during any Leave Year, any remaining leave will not be reinstated or paid out, except as permitted by Office of Personnel Management regulations if the employee transfers to another federal agency.

# **Requests for Wounded Warriors Leave**

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## **Foreseeable Leave**

All employees requesting Wounded Warriors Leave must do the following:

- a. Submit their request on PS Form 3971, *Request for or Notification of Absence*, in advance to the appropriate supervisor, and
- b. Designate the reason for the absence as “other” and write “Wounded Warriors Leave” in the space provided.

## **Unforeseeable Leave**

The Postal Service makes an exception to the advance approval requirement for unexpected treatment that qualifies for Wounded Warriors Leave. When the need to use Wounded Warriors Leave is not foreseeable, employees must notify the appropriate supervisor of the following as soon as possible:

- a. The employee’s treatment,
- b. The expected duration of the absence, and
- c. The applicability of Wounded Warriors Leave.

Alternatively, the employee may use the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to record his or her absences. If the employee does not submit PS Form 3971 before the absence, the employee must complete the form upon his or her return to duty.

## **Approval or Disapproval**

The supervisor is responsible for approving or disapproving requests for Wounded Warriors Leave by signing PS Form 3971, and returning a copy to the employee. If a supervisor does not approve a request for leave as submitted, including determinations of Absent Without Official Leave (AWOL), the supervisor must check the Disapproved block on PS Form 3971 and give the reason(s) for the disapproval in writing in the space provided. When a request is disapproved, the supervisor may also grant an alternate type of leave.

## **Verification**

To verify that Wounded Warriors Leave requested by an employee is appropriately used for the treatment of a service-connected disability,

the requesting employee must submit to the supervisor a copy of PS Form 5980, *Treatment Verification for Wounded Warriors Leave*, certified by a health care provider that the employee used the leave to receive treatment for a covered disability. The employee must provide the verification no later than 15 calendar days after the employee returns to work.

## Charging Wounded Warriors Leave

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Employees must charge Wounded Warriors Leave in the same manner as sick leave, as described in ELM 513.4.

## Integration with Other Leave Policies

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### **General**

Nothing in this section is intended to limit employees' rights or benefits available under other current policies or collective bargaining agreements.

### **Integration with Family and Medical Leave Act**

Employees eligible for Wounded Warriors Leave may also be eligible to protection under the Family and Medical Leave Act. (See ELM 515 for more information and eligibility requirements.) Supervisors will initiate FMLA leave if they have reasonable grounds to believe that the leave might qualify. It is the employee's responsibility to provide complete and sufficient documentation to establish eligibility for FMLA. FMLA protection will run concurrently with Wounded Warriors Leave.