

**Contract Administration Unit**

Brian Renfroe, Executive Vice President  
Lew Drass, Vice President  
Christopher Jackson, Director of City Delivery  
Manuel L. Peralta Jr., Director of Safety and Health  
Ron Watson, Director of Retired Members

# Postal Service expands Wounded Warriors Leave

In past articles, we have written about Wounded Warriors Leave (WWL), a benefit made possible by the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015. This category of leave allows eligible employees to use up to 104 hours of leave to undergo medical treatment for a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more.

In response to this law, the Postal Service in 2016 released a Management Instruction (EL-510-2016-7) setting forth its policy guidelines and procedures for the eligibility and use of WWL. At the time, the Postal Service informed NALC that this benefit would be extended only to eligible employees hired on or after Nov. 5, 2016, and to employees who leave the Postal Service's employment or take military leave to participate in active-duty military service, sustain a service-connected disability rating of at least 30 percent during that military leave or service, and then return directly from that leave or service on or after Nov. 5, 2016.

In November of that same year, the Postal Service notified NALC that it decided this benefit also would be extended to eligible employees who were on the rolls as of Nov. 4, 2016, in addition to the employees mentioned above. Those employees who were employed on Nov. 4, 2016, and who otherwise met the eligibility requirements of the 2015 Act could use up to 104 hours of WWL during the 12-month period beginning Nov. 5, 2016. Additionally, eligible employees who used leave for a condition covered by the Act prior to the Postal Service notifying NALC of the change were eligible to request to have their leave converted to WWL. Management Instruction EL-510-2016-8 reflected this change.

Recently, the Postal Service notified NALC of an updated version of the Management Instruction. The most significant change is that, beginning with the 2019 leave year that starts on Jan. 5, 2019, eligible employees will now receive 104 hours of WWL *each* leave year; previously, they had received it for one 12-month eligibility period.

Eligible hires will receive 104 hours of WWL upon hire, as required by law, to be used for the remainder of the current leave year. Each January, all disabled veterans with a 30 percent or more combined disability rating will receive 104 hours of WWL to use during the leave year. At the end of each leave year, any remaining WWL will be forfeited but, assuming the employee still has a combined disability rating of 30 percent or more, he or she will receive a new 104 hours at the start of the new leave year. Any unused WWL is not rolled over to the next year, nor will it be paid out if the employee leaves.

The following reflects the rules regarding the eligibility and crediting of this leave:

## Eligibility

### *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

### *General*

It is an 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 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.

*(continued on next page)*

# Postal Service expands Wounded Warriors Leave (continued)

## 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 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 OPM regulations if the employee transfers to another federal agency.

## Steps eligible employees must take

Eligible employees are required to request this leave in advance when possible by completing and submitting to their supervisor a PS Form 3971, Request for or Notification of Absence. The supervisor is responsible for approving or disapproving requests by signing PS Form 3971 and returning a copy to the employee. In addition, to verify that any WWL requested by an employee is appropriately used for the treatment of a service-connected disability, the requesting employee must provide proof from a health care provider that the employee used the leave to receive treatment for a covered disability. The Postal Service created a form to be used for this verification, PS Form 5980, Treatment Verification for Wounded Warriors Leave.

The employee should designate the reason for the absence as “Other” on PS Form 3971 and write “Wounded Warriors Leave” in the space provided. Should the need to use this leave be unforeseeable, the employee must notify his or her supervisor of the expected duration of the ab-

sence and the applicability of WWL. Employees also may use the Interactive Voice Response system to report absences if this process is used in their employing office. A PS Form 3971 is required upon returning to work and a PS Form 5980 no later than 15 calendar days after returning.

Employees eligible for WWL also may be eligible for protection under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA—see Section 515 of the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual* 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 WWL.

**WWL is a very important benefit. Disabled veterans generally require regular medical appointments to maintain their health and to retain eligibility for veterans’ benefits. Frequently, it is unavoidable that such appointments must be scheduled during normal work hours and letter carriers in the past were therefore often required to use leave without pay (LWOP) or sick leave to attend those appointments. WWL provides relief to those who are eligible; now it will provide that relief every year.**

Information regarding the rules and regulations of WWL is available on the NALC website, [nalc.org](http://nalc.org), and can be found on the “Military Veterans,” “Contract Administration Unit” and “City Delivery” pages. PS Form 5980 can be found on those pages as well. After reviewing those guidelines, if you have any further questions about WWL, make sure to discuss them with your shop steward or a branch officer.

## Join the NALC Veterans Group

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members—both active and retired letter carriers—who are also military veterans the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans.

Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for your military service and membership in NALC.

If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at right and mail it to the address included. A fillable version is also available at [nalc.org/veterans](http://nalc.org/veterans).



You continue to serve your country—  
**THANK YOU!**

## NALC Veterans Group

Complete this form and mail it to:  
NALC Veterans Group, c/o NALC,  
100 Indiana Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001-2144

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

NALC BRANCH NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ BRANCH OF SERVICE: \_\_\_\_\_

I BELONG TO THE FOLLOWING VETERAN GROUP(S):

AMERICAN LEGION  DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS  VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_