



Wounded Warriors Leave rights

The creation of Wounded Warriors Leave (WWL) came about in response to the passage of the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015, which allows employees who meet the eligibility requirements to use this category of leave to undergo medical treatment for a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more. As a disabled veteran myself, being eligible to use up to 104 hours of this distinct category of leave has made it easier to keep all of my Veterans Affairs (VA) appointments.

This category of leave is an important benefit to letter carriers who are also veterans with a disability rating of 30 percent or greater. Disabled veterans generally are required to attend regular medical appointments to maintain their health and to continue their eligibility to receive their veterans' benefits. Frequently, such appointments must be scheduled during normal work hours, and before the creation of WWL, letter carriers often were required to use leave without pay (LWOP) to attend those appointments. WWL provides some relief to those who are eligible and must receive necessary treatment.

Eligibility to receive WWL can be verified on the carrier's PS Form 50, which is found in their e-OPF. In Box 11 on their PS Form 50, it should indicate "6-10pt-Comp over 30%." If Box 11 does not denote "6-10pt-Comp over 30%," the employee will need to submit the necessary documentation to certify that they meet the 30 percent eligibility.

It is an employee's responsibility to notify the Postal Service of their eligibility before requesting WWL. Employees must provide documentation from the Department of Veterans Affairs, or on any Office of Personnel Management (OPM) certification form

developed for administration of WWL, certifying that they have a qualifying service-connected disability. Eligible employees who have not yet submitted the necessary paperwork should do so now.

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 absence 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 *Em-*

ployee 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.

The eligibility requirements, as outlined in USPS Management Instruction EL-510-2019-2 (M-01901 in NALC's Materials Reference System), are as follows:

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 documen-

tation 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 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.

Information regarding the rules and regulations of WWL is available on the NALC website, nalc.org, and can be found on the "NALC 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.

If you are a military veteran, don't forget to sign up with our Veterans Group. All veterans registered with the Veterans Group will be recognized in the November *Postal Record*.

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. It is free to join. Members receive a pin and an *NALC Veterans Guide* as a symbol of gratitude for your military service and membership in NALC.

This month's column was written by Assistant to the President for Community Services Christina Vela Davidson.

Join the NALC Veterans Group

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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.**



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: _____

Free
to join