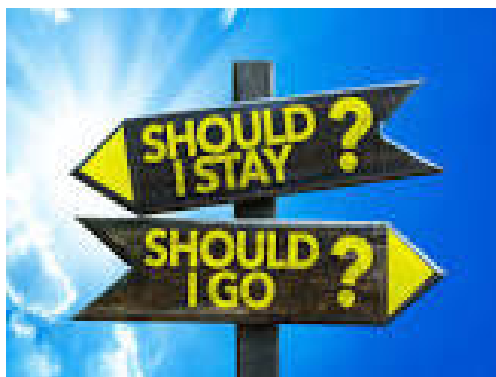


The Force

In Need of a Hardship Relocation?



With all the changes that are happening around us, many people are facing changes affecting their personal lives. Some of those challenges might cause one the need to relocate. Article 15 in the National Agreement speaks about relocating with the IRS.

If you are experiencing the need to relocate due to a hardship, there's an opportunity for you to submit a request. The Employer has determined, that, consistent with workload needs, it will relocate an employee demonstrating a significant hardship that can be relieved by a relocation outside their commuting area, if there is a vacant position which the Employer intends to fill in the employee's current job series and the employee meets the position and skill requirements. Employees requesting a hardship relocation will be eligible for positions to be permanently filled at the same or lower grade for which they meet OPM qualifications and selective placement factors.

Once the request for hardship is approved and there's an open vacancy announcement, the relocation will be granted, providing that the employee meets the hardship criteria. Employees who have access to the IRS intranet can submit their application through the automated online system. Employees who do not have access to the IRS intranet via an IRS computer, will use Form 13442.

To be eligible for the hardship relocation, the employee must show their most recent annual rating of record is fully successful or above, they are not currently on a Performance Improvement Plan, they are not currently the subject of a disciplinary action or a continuing conduct investigation; and they are not applying to return to the commuting area of a POD from which they had relocated under a new appointment or competitive selection in the last two years.

After approval, the hardship relocation application is good for one year. At the expiration of the one-year period, the employee must reapply. Upon reapplying, the employee may be required to recertify that the hardship still exists before an office extends an offer of a position.

To find more information regarding the hardship, you can visit

<http://hco.web.irs.gov/apps/TPHS/index.asp>

Angela Moore

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Fair Act	2
Processing applications	2
Bound to Happen	3-5
Stewards list	5
FECA	6
Discount	7
Summer Campaign	7
United Benefits	8

Federal Adjustment of Income Rates Act “FAIR Act”



Legislation has been proposed to increase the wages being paid to the federal work force. Rep. Gerry Connelly (VA) and Sen. Brian Schatz (HI) have introduced the Federal Adjustment of Income Rates (FAIR) Act, which calls for an average 5.1 percent pay increase for federal employees. The proposed pay increase consists of a 4.1 percent across-the-board adjustment, as well as an average 1 percent adjustment for locality pay.

While we all would appreciate taking home a larger paycheck at the end of the pay cycle, this legislation would make a much bigger impact on the work force. In 1990, the Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act was established, which set a goal of a 5 percent disparity between private and public sector pay. In the last report conducted by the Federal Salary Council, the wages in the private sector outpaced those in the public sector by 23.11 percent. What this means to

you, on average, is if you were performing a similar job in the private sector your salary would be 23.11 percent higher. While there are advantages to being a federal employee, competitive pay is certainly an area where an opportunity exists.

If your take home pay is an important topic for you, please consider supporting the FAIR Act (H.R. 6398 and S. 3518). You can voice your support on nteu.org in the “Action Center”. NTEU believes all federal employees deserve for their wages to be competitive to their counterparts in the private sector.

Alex Walker

IRS and NTEU agree to start processing voluntary relocation applications

We are pleased to inform you that NTEU has agreed to allow IRS to start processing voluntary relocations for those who have applied to the current announcement, as opposed to waiting until the closing date of July 20, 2022, in order to maximize voluntary relocations as close to the start of Phase 2 of the Return to Office. Below is the language IRS and NTEU have agreed to:

In accordance with Article 15, Section 6 of the 2022 National Agreement, bargaining unit employees may apply for a voluntary relocation after January 20 and up through July 20. The parties agree, on a one-time-only/non-precedential basis, that applications for voluntary relocations submitted or updated after January 20, 2022, will be processed, and employees realigned, in accordance with Section 6.D for all vacant positions opening on or after June 24, 2022, and through the remainder of the calendar year. In addition, the Employer has discretion to grant voluntary relocations for this same period (on or after June 24, 2022,) under the Article 15, Section 7 process (i.e., Voluntary Relocations by Realignment Within a Division). In accordance with Article 15, Section 6, no applications for voluntary relocations will be accepted after July 20 for this calendar year. All other conditions of Article 15 remain in effect.

Additional information about voluntary relocation is available on the IRS Source.

(Submitted by HCO – Human Capital Office)

IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN!

GUIDANCE ON WHAT TO DO IF YOU TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID



W & I decided morale (or their idea of it) is more important than life itself. Acting on that determination, Accounts Management forced employees to have face to face meetings, even intimidating employees into choosing their “in office day” based on their team meeting day. Last week, teams were meeting in conference rooms less than 6 feet apart from each other and for longer than 15 minutes. Someone, in that team, tested positive for covid, that night. (A blind squirrel could’ve seen that coming.)

Here is the latest guidance from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force:

Q: What is considered to be a close contact?

A: A [close contact](#) is defined as being within 6 feet of someone who has [probable](#) or confirmed COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.

Q: What steps should an agency take if an individual who is up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, or had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days, has a known close contact with someone with COVID-19?

A: If an asymptomatic individual has a known close contact with someone with COVID-19, they do not need to quarantine if they are [up to date with COVID-19 vaccines](#) or if they had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days (i.e., they tested positive using a [viral test](#)).

Pursuant to Executive Order 13991 and consistent with CDC guidance, agencies must instruct these individuals to watch for symptoms for 10 full days after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19 (the date of last close contact is considered day 0 and day 1 is the first full day after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19). Agencies also must instruct these individuals to take precautions when working onsite at an agency workplace or interacting with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities for 10 full days from the date they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19, including wearing a [well-fitting mask](#) when around others (see FAQs on [mask-wearing](#)), avoiding eating and drinking around others, avoiding environments such as dining facilities and gyms where they may be unmasked around others, avoiding people who are [immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease](#), and avoiding nursing homes and other high-risk settings. If an individual is unable to wear a mask, then they must not enter a Federal facility or interact with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities for 10 days.

As part of agency testing protocols, and pursuant to Executive Order 13991 and consistent with CDC guidance, agencies must require that such individuals working onsite at an agency workplace or interacting with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities be tested at least 5 full days after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19 (unless they tested positive for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) within the previous 90 days and subsequently recovered and remain without COVID-19 symptoms, in which case they do not need to get tested after close contact). If they test positive or if they at any time develop COVID-19 symptoms, they must follow agency protocols on [isolation](#). If the individual is not working onsite at an agency workplace or interacting with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities within 10 days of the close contact, then the agency should not require them to be tested.

(Continued on next page)

CDC's [setting-specific guidance](#) provides additional recommendations for settings such as congregate settings and healthcare settings; where there is a conflict with more general guidance, agencies must follow the setting-specific guidance should be followed. CDC generally recommends a 10-day quarantine for certain congregate settings (including correctional or detention facilities) that have a high risk of secondary transmission. Decisions to shorten quarantine in these settings should be made in consultation with State, local, Tribal, or territorial health departments and should take into consideration the context and characteristics of the facility.

Q: What steps should an agency take if an individual who is not up to date with COVID-19 vaccines has a known close contact with someone with COVID-19?

A: If an individual who is not [up to date with COVID-19 vaccines](#), and has not had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days, has a known [close contact](#) with someone with COVID-19, they must follow agency [quarantine](#) protocols and not enter a Federal facility or interact with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities for at least 5 full days after their last close contact with someone who has COVID-19 (the date of exposure is considered day 0, and day 1 is the first full day after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19). If they are unable to wear a mask when around others, such as pursuant to a medical condition or disability for which they have received a reasonable accommodation from their agency, they must not enter a Federal facility or interact with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities for 10 full days.

During quarantine, agencies must, pursuant to Executive Order 13991 and consistent with CDC guidance, instruct an individual to watch for [COVID-19 symptoms](#), and if they develop symptoms, to follow agency protocols for [isolation](#). The agency also must instruct individuals who have quarantined to continue to take precautions when working onsite at an agency workplace or interacting with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities for 10 full days from the date they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19, including wearing a [well-fitting mask](#) when around others (see FAQs on [mask-wearing](#)), avoiding eating and drinking around others, avoiding environments such as dining facilities and gyms where they may be unmasked around others, avoiding people who are [immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease](#), and avoiding nursing homes and other high-risk settings.

As part of agency testing protocols and pursuant to Executive Order 13991 and consistent with CDC, agencies must require that these individuals be tested at least 5 full days after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19. If they test negative, they can return to their workplace and interact with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities. If they test positive, they should follow CDC recommendations on [isolation](#).

If the individual is unable to get a test 5 days after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19, an agency may determine it will allow them to return to their workplace after day 5 if they have been without [COVID-19 symptoms](#) throughout the 5-day period. If the individual is not working onsite at an agency workplace or interacting with members of the public in person as part of their official responsibilities within 10 days of the close contact, then the agency should not require them to be tested.

CDC's [setting-specific guidance](#) provides additional recommendations for settings such as congregate settings and healthcare settings; where there is a conflict with more general guidance, agencies must follow the setting-specific guidance, pursuant to Executive Order 13991. CDC generally recommends a 10-day quarantine for certain congregate settings (including correctional or detention facilities) that have a high risk of secondary transmission. Decisions to shorten quarantine in these settings should be made in consultation with State, local, Tribal, or territorial health departments and should take into consideration the context and characteristics of the facility.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued)

In addition, NTEU73 recommends that employees ensure that managers file an incident report and, if they test positive within 21 days, file a Federal Employee Compensation Act (FECA) claim for the workplace disease. Information on how to file a FECA claim is found here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/owcp/FECA/fec-faq>

At this time, the CDC estimates that approximately 5-10% of the folks who get covid also experience “Long Covid.” Long Covid can be disabling. Please make sure you file the incident report and the claim. If you are one of the folks who gets long covid, your medical treatment and absences are paid for by the employer, who forced you to take this unnecessary risk for the sake of being best pals with your coworkers (germ bags) in your *assigned* team.

I fully understand that it is necessary to come in the office to pick up and drop off work, or to be there twice a pay period to maintain locality pay. It is in no way necessary to sit in an enclosed space with 15 near strangers for half an hour to decide when food day should be. (It shouldn't happen, at all, right now.) Or to verbally share the IRM updates that are already sent in alerts daily.

I like my coworkers, too. I am positive they are all fastidiously clean in the preparation of communal food. It's still risky to partake after some random person hangs over the food table to sniff the sumptuous breakfast casserole, or sticks their bare hand, fingers clean from a good lickin', in the potato chip bag. We all know it happens and, as manners require, pretend we don't.

Most folks' morale is raised by being allowed to do their job, get their pay and take care of their family, without risking their or their families' health and wellbeing to do it.

Debbie Mullikin



STEWARDS' CORNER

Your NTEU Stewards are here to fight for you! We are available in person, by phone, email, or skype!

GATEWAY STEWARDS

President:

Debbie Mullikin

Vice President:

Chris Pierce

Secretary/Chief Steward:

Shannon Lovins

Day Shift Full Time Stewards:

Loretha Hudson, Rachel Lovins,
Angela Moore

Day Shift Part Time Stewards:

Tonya Morris, Nicole Guethlein,
Jennifer Smith, Hope Osborne, Thomas
Bayer, Brandi Riggs, Shonda Collins,
Nichole Williams, Alistar Blair

Swing Shift Chief Steward:

Alex Walker

Swing Shift Part Time Stewards:

Brandy Belew

ISO BUILDING

Treasurer/Full Time Steward:

Janet Colwell

NTEU EMAIL

ctr.cov.cirsc.nteu.73.covington@irs.gov

Did you hear it's Easier to File a FECA Claim for COVID-19 now?

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that President Biden signed on March 11, 2021, makes it **much easier** for federal workers diagnosed with COVID-19 to establish coverage under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act. To establish a COVID-19 claim, you simply need to establish that you are a "covered employee," meaning that:

1. **You were diagnosed with COVID-19.** Specifically, you were diagnosed with COVID-19 while employed in the Federal service at any time during the period of January 27, 2020 to January 27, 2023; and,
2. **Your duties include any risk of exposure.** Specifically, within **21** days of your diagnosis of COVID-19, you carried out duties that—
 - a. required contact with patients, members of the public, or co-workers; or
 - b. included a risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus.



What Does the Change in the Law Mean?

1. **You are only required to establish that your duties included a risk of exposure to COVID-19.** You do not have to prove you were engaged in high-risk employment; that you were actually exposed to the virus; or that you were exposed to someone who had the virus while performing your duties.
2. **If you establish that you are a "covered employee," any diagnosed COVID-19 will be deemed to have been proximately caused by your Federal employment.** You no longer have to establish a causal link between your employment and your COVID-19 diagnosis.



What to Do:

You can quickly and easily file a **CA-1** Claim for COVID-19 through the Employees' Compensation Operations and Management Portal (ECOMP). You can access ECOMP at ecomp.dol.gov. If you have never used ECOMP, you can [view this instructional video](#) to learn how to register for an ECOMP account, [and this video](#) to learn how to file a COVID-19 claim. If you don't have access to a computer, contact your supervisor.



Why File Now? What if I Think I Am OK?

If you were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 or even if you believe you just have a mild case of COVID-19, you should consider filing a COVID-19 FECA claim **now** even if you have fully recovered and/or had an asymptomatic infection.

- In the event you develop a consequential injury, impairment or illness later as a result of your COVID-19 diagnosis, timely filing your claim **now** will facilitate the processing of any future claim for any such consequential condition or impairment.
- If you wait until you experience a consequential injury or illness to file your COVID-19 claim, your claim may be subject to time limitation and you will have to establish **both** the initial COVID-19 claim and the consequential condition claim before benefits can begin.



OFFICE OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION PROGRAMS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Newport Aquarium Discount Tickets



Here's how you can access you discount tickets:

1. Go to [Newportaquarium.com/corporatediscounts](https://newportaquarium.com/corporatediscounts)
2. Click buy now
3. Enter promo code MEM73 and hit submit
4. Select your date, time, and quantity
5. Continue to checkout

See, Touch, and Explore all that's under the sea! You will be amazed at all there is to do at the Newport Aquarium!



⚙️ The 2022 Summer Membership Campaign will run from May 8, 2022, through September 24, 2022.

💰 An incentive of \$50 will be paid to each new member that completes and turns in the form 1187 during the campaign period. If you are a member and recruit a non-member to join you can get \$25 for each recruit. They need to put your name at the bottom of the for 1187.

🕒 Incentives will only be paid for new members who have not been a member of NTEU within the past year.

Retirement Assistance for Federal Employees

Planning for your retirement starts the day you begin your career, but the path to retirement differs for everyone. Depending on your age, years in service, and needs, your retirement strategy will change to suit your situation.

While planning your retirement, you'll have to make irrevocable decisions. That's why it's so important to understand your options.

Retirement Support

- Assisting with Retirement Paperwork and/or the GRB Platform
- Setting Retirement Goals
- Understanding Options Before and After Retirement
- Creating a Budget
- TSP and 401(k) Strategies
- IRA Options to Fit Your Goals
- Survivor Annuity Options
- Maximizing Your Pension
- Social Security Strategy
- Calculating Your Retirement Date

Schedule a One-on-One Retirement Review

Paul & Roxie Thornton
paul@unitedbenefits.com
Call: 423-309-2758

Christopher Lee
chris@unitedbenefits.com
Call/Text: 256-740-2166



UNITED
B E N E F I T S

866-558-2121
www.unitedbenefits.com