

# Wounded Warriors Leave update



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**T**his is the season for goodwill and generosity. This year I can report that the Postal Service has gotten into the spirit of things. USPS has decided to amend its previous policy regarding implementation of the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 in a most positive way.

The Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 is a law that provides veterans who have a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more with 104 hours of Wounded Warriors Leave (WWL) during their first year of employment as a letter carrier. This benefit also applies to any letter carrier with a service-connected disability in the calendar year the disability rating

rises to 30 percent or more.

The 104 hours of WWL is a separate category of leave that is in addition to any earned sick and/or annual leave. It can be used to undergo medical treatment for a service-connected disability, but any remaining balance at the end of the year cannot be carried over to the next year or cashed in. It is a “use it or lose it” situation.

You may remember that the Postal Service implemented its policy on this issue as required by law in September 2016 and then decided to expand its implementation policy and provided 104 hours of WWL to all veterans who were letter carriers with a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more as of Nov. 5, 2016. However, its policy was to provide this benefit for only one year to those who qualified.

The Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 did not require the USPS to provide this benefit to all veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more in the first place, so when it did this only for one year, there was nothing for us to complain about or challenge.

This brings us to the here and now. The Postal Service has decided to amend its previous policy regarding implementation of the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 yet again. This time, it has decided to provide 104 hours of WWL to all veterans who are letter carriers with a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more each year going forward.

WWL will still be a “use it or lose it” situation, so any remaining balance at the end of the year will not be carried over to the next year or cashed in. However, a new balance of 104 hours of WWL will be credited to those letter carriers who qualify at the beginning of each year. This new

policy is scheduled to go into effect in January, and I want to take this opportunity to commend the Postal Service for its decision to amend its policy regarding WWL. Please see the Contract Talk in this issue of *The Postal Record* for more information on the subject.

## Step B update

**The last time I reported on this subject was in my June article.** There were 4,278 cases pending a decision at Step B at that time with 2,633 of the cases coming from only 10 of the 67 USPS districts. The same story was true with respect to the number of these cases that had been at Step B awaiting a decision for more than 14 days. Out of the 4,278 cases that were pending, 2,680 were late with a decision and 2,114 of them came from the very same 10 USPS districts. This amounted to 60 percent of the Step B cases and 80 percent of the backlogged cases that we had at that time coming from these 10 USPS districts.

As of this writing, there are 2,589 cases pending a decision at Step B with 1,351 of the cases coming from only six of the 67 USPS districts. As before, the same story is true with respect to the number of these cases that have been at Step B awaiting a decision for more than 14 days. Out of the 2,589 cases that are pending, 1,261 are late with a decision and 1,004 of them came from the very same six USPS districts. This amounts to 52 percent of the Step B cases and 80 percent of the backlogged cases that we have come from just six USPS districts.

From my point of view, we have a lot of work to do, but we have made significant progress to reduce our Step B backlogs. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts management has made to work with us on this front in the last several months. There are (and have been) real joint efforts underway to complete the project of addressing the national Step B backlog that has existed for a long time now.

For instance, we jointly sent out 250 cases from the backlogged areas referenced above to other Step B teams around the country this week and are continuing to activate additional backup Step B teams to address the Step B backlogs. I think there also are some Step B backlog elimination surprises coming this holiday that I do not have room to explain. I will report on this again early next year.

**In closing, I want to wish all of you and your families a wonderful holiday season and a happy New Year!**

