News

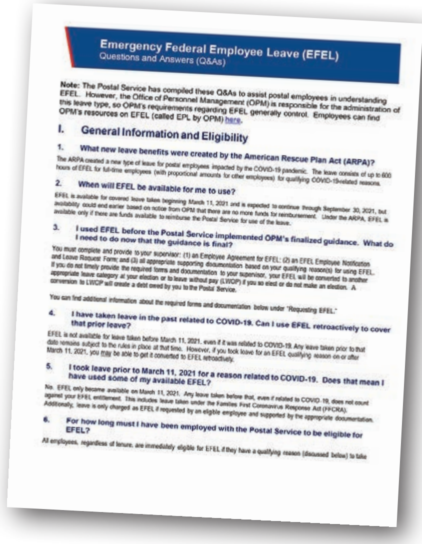
Emergency Federal Employee Leave update

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Postal Service have issued guidance implementing the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which was signed into law on March 11. (The full guidance is on the NALC website.) This law established an important new leave category called Emergency Federal Employees Leave (EFEL). Prior to OPM's issuing of the guidance, the Postal Service had been approving EFEL on an interim basis in two-week increments.

When requesting this leave, employees must submit a completed PS Form 3971, Request for or Notification of Absence, and a COVID-19 Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL) Employee Notification and Leave Request Form, along with documentation supporting the need for the leave. Employees also will need to submit a signed Employee Agreement in Connection with Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL), provided under Section 4001 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, before the first use of EFEL.

The Postal Service has issued guidance, and a document about frequently asked questions, on EFEL. To view these documents and the forms referenced above, go to nalc.org/news/nalc-updates/emergency-federal-employee-leave-update.

NALC will continue to provide updates regarding this leave as they become available. **PR**



Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL)
Questions and Answers (Q&As)

Note: The Postal Service has compiled these Q&As to assist postal employees in understanding EFEL. However, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is responsible for the administration of this leave type, so OPM's requirements regarding EFEL generally control. Employees can find OPM's resources on EFEL (called EPL by OPM) here.

I. General Information and Eligibility

1. What new leave benefits were created by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)?

The ARPA created a new type of leave for postal employees impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The leave consists of up to 600 hours of EFEL for full-time employees (with proportional amounts for other employees) for qualifying COVID-19-related reasons.

2. When will EFEL be available for me to use?

EFEL is available for covered leave taken beginning March 11, 2021 and is expected to continue through September 30, 2021, but availability could end earlier based on notice from OPM that there are no more funds for reimbursement. Under the ARPA, EFEL is available only if there are funds available to reimburse the Postal Service for use of the leave.

3. I used EFEL before the Postal Service implemented OPM's finalized guidance. What do I need to do now that the guidance is final?

You must complete and provide to your supervisor: (1) an Employee Agreement for EFEL; (2) an EFEL Employee Notification and Leave Request Form; and (3) all appropriate supporting documentation based on your qualifying reason(s) for using EFEL. If you do not timely provide the required forms and documentation to your supervisor, your EFEL will be converted to another appropriate leave category at your election or to leave without pay (LWOP) if you so elect or do not make an election. A conversion to LWOP will create a debt owed by you to the Postal Service.

You can find additional information about the required forms and documentation below under "Requesting EFEL."

4. I have taken leave in the past related to COVID-19. Can I use EFEL retroactively to cover that prior leave?

EFEL is not available for leave taken before March 11, 2021, even if it was related to COVID-19. Any leave taken prior to that date remains subject to the rules in place at that time. However, if you took leave for an EFEL qualifying reason on or after March 11, 2021, you may be able to get it converted to EFEL retroactively.

5. I took leave prior to March 11, 2021 for a reason related to COVID-19. Does that mean I have used some of my available EFEL?

No. EFEL only became available on March 11, 2021. Any leave taken before that, even if related to COVID-19, does not count against your EFEL entitlement. This includes leave taken under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). Additionally, leave is only charged as EFEL if requested by an eligible employee and supported by the appropriate documentation.

6. For how long must I have been employed with the Postal Service to be eligible for EFEL?

All employees, regardless of tenure, are immediately eligible for EFEL if they have a qualifying reason (discussed below) to take

A Q-and-A about the leave is available on nalc.org.

Online officers' training helping branches during pandemic

Since February, NALC has held four sessions of its Branch Officers' Training and one special session of a Preparing the LM-2 class virtually for 579 branch officers.

Before the pandemic, the training would be held over several days at a hotel in a location somewhere around the country. But with the pandemic making in-person sessions difficult, NALC has held the training using Webex meeting software. Moving the sessions online has allowed attendees to go through the training on their computer or mobile device from their home or branch hall.

Because of limitations, the training has been modified from the three and a half day in-person version to select subjects that are timely in assisting branch officers in the performance of their fiduciary and administrative responsibilities. To allow for maximum branch participation, registration has been limited to two officers per branch per session and sign-up can be done only by branch presidents through the Members Only portal.

Veronica Gainey of Sacramento, CA Branch 133 had wanted to take the training last year when she became secretary-treasurer of the branch, but she didn't have the chance because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, although she was already preparing to retire, she attended the training with her branch president, which helped put the branch in a better position for the next person who serves as secretary-treasurer.

"This class was so informative," she said. She learned so much that she went back to her records from 2020 and redid them so they would be correct for the branch going forward. "I had to redo everything, but I made it easier for the next person coming in as far as labeling, what needed to be itemized, what needed to be on the LM-2. If you're doing anything involving taxes, you want to be sure it's being done properly."

Gainey appreciated the convenience of doing the training virtually, as opposed to traveling. "All you have got to do is plug it in and turn on a computer," she said.

Ken Mayfield, president of Oklahoma City Branch 458, also attended one of the online sessions. Though he had previously attended the training in person about five years earlier in St. Louis, he wanted to go through it again. He liked the convenience, too.

"The advantage to me was the cost," he said. "I liked being able to do a refresher online without a cost to the branch."

The new financial secretary for Branch 458 took the course with Mayfield; it was his first time with the subject. While the financial secretary had a good experience, Mayfield highly recommended the course for experienced branch officers. "For me, for a refresher, I thought the online was perfect," Mayfield said.

"I do like taking classes in person, but the way they did it, I think they did an excellent job in the way they presented everything," Gainey said. "They gave us the opportunity to ask questions. They took the time to answer them. I thought it was put together very well."

In addition to the regular Branch Officers' Training topics, NALC also offered a special "Preparing the LM-2" session. While all branches that receive funds are required to file an LM report to the Department of Labor annually, many file an LM-3 or LM-4, which are less involved reports for branches with total annual receipts less than $250,000 and $10,000, respectively. But the LM-2 is a much more detailed, lengthier report that only NALC's larger branches file.

"The normal LM-3 training class does not get into the extra details that this report requires," NALC Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine said, "nor would the vast majority of our branches, who file LM-3s or LM-4s, need the additional information that is required on an LM-2."

Deaf or hard of hearing?

To ensure that our deaf or hard-of-hearing members are receiving appropriate accommodations to communicate with other Postal Service employees, including their union representatives, NALC is planning to reach out to these individuals to discuss and learn more about any challenges they face. We are in the process of planning a virtual conference for this purpose. We are asking letter carriers who are deaf or hard of hearing to contact the union by going to the NALC website at nalc.org, clicking on the Members Only portal in the upper right-hand corner, and logging in. From there you can simply check the appropriate box if you would like to be identified as deaf or hard of hearing. Doing so will let NALC know who you are, where you work and which branch you are a member of.

The modified Branch Officers' Training includes:

DOL Reporting—This session reviews the history of the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA) and how it affects the activities of the unions and union officers. Participants learn about each title of the LMRDA and the reporting requirements under the law.

Preparing LM-3—This session covers completing the annual LM-3, which is required to be filed by branches with total annual receipts of at least $10,000 but less than $250,000. An LM-4 is filed by branches with annual financial receipts of less than $10,000. Officers who file an LM-4 also would benefit from this session.

Preparing 990s—This session covers completing the required annual Internal Revenue Service filing.

Membership & Dues/You've just been elected...now what?—This session guides branch officers through membership issues that they deal with daily and discusses how to read a dues roster; it also focuses on helping officers learn more about branch operations.

"I highly recommend [the class] for when people become new officers," Gainey said, because it helps them "know what you need to do properly." PR