

**NORTH GEORGIA HEALTH DISTRICT**  
**County Board of Health Personnel Policy #1007**  
Cherokee, Fannin, Gilmer, Murray, Pickens, Whitfield

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY**

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** May 1, 2010

**RELEASE DATE:** May 1, 2010

**REFERENCE:** Rules of the State Personnel Board - Rule 16

Leaves of absence without pay are generally approved only for medical reasons when employees are reasonably expected to be able to return to work. Leaves of absence without pay should be approved only for short periods of time, unless there are extraordinary circumstances that support an extended period of time. When extended leave is requested, employees are to submit written documentation that supports the extraordinary circumstances.

**GENERAL PROVISIONS**

1. Classified and unclassified employees who are eligible for leave benefits may submit written requests for regular and contingent leaves of absence without pay for specified periods of time.
2. Leaves of absence without pay do not cause a break in continuous employment.
3. Leaves of absence without pay may be granted or denied at the discretion of the NGHD Management Team.
4. Leaves of absence without pay do not include brief absences charged to short-term (other) leave without pay (15 calendar days or less).

**AUTHORIZED (REGULAR) LWOP**

1. If an authorized (regular) leave of absence without pay is approved, the position which the employee occupied or a position of equal grade and pay is held for the employee's return.
2. At the expiration of an authorized (regular) leave of absence without pay, the employee will be returned to work without loss of any rights if the employee has complied with the terms and conditions outlined in the notice of approval.

**CONTINGENT LWOP**

1. If a contingent leave of absence without pay is approved, the position which the employee occupied is **not held**.
2. The CBH organizational unit may fill the position from which an employee is on a contingent leave of absence without pay.
3. The employee is entitled to return to work only if a "suitable vacancy," as defined in the notice of approval, is available at the expi-

## LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY (continue)

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ration of the leave.

### **FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE**

1. When absence from work is due to a family and medical leave qualifying reason, employees should be placed on available family and medical leave (with or without pay) prior to placement on leaves of absence without pay.
2. If family and medical leave has been exhausted or is otherwise not available, employees may request leaves of absence without pay.
3. If family and medical leave has already been granted and used, requests for authorized (regular) leaves of absence without pay should be closely reviewed and may be denied unless there are extraordinary circumstances that support the requests.

### **MEDICAL EXAMINATION**

Under limited circumstances and ONLY with the approval of the District Health Director, the Personnel Manager may direct an employee to undergo a medical (physical and/or psychiatric) examination at the expense of the CBH

1. This examination may be required prior to approving use of accrued leave, approving a leave of absence without pay, allowing an employee to return from leave with or without pay.
2. An employee is required to authorize the release of the results of the medical examination to the Personnel Manager. The results must be considered confidential and are to be shared with individuals only on a "need to know" basis.
3. Upon receipt of the results, a determination will be made regarding the appropriate action to be taken.
4. Appropriate actions include, but is not limited to, the following:
  - 4.1 The employee may be allowed to use accrued leave.
  - 4.2 The employee may request and be granted an authorized (regular) or contingent leave of absence without pay.
  - 4.3 The employee may be referred to a treatment program.
  - 4.4 The employee may be separated.
5. If a determination is made to allow the employee to return to work, the employee may be returned unrestricted or with employment restrictions that can be reasonably accommodated.

## LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY (continue)

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### REQUEST

1. Employees are to submit written requests for leaves of absence without pay through their supervisors to authorized officials. The requests must include the following information:

- 1.1 the type of leave of absence (regular or contingent) requested;

**NOTE: If not specified, an authorized official may designate the type of leave of absence without pay.**

- 1.2 the reason for the leave of absence without pay;

- 1.3 the start date;

- 1.4 the return date; and,

- 1.5 any other information relevant to the request (e.g., statement from attending health care provider).

2. Requests based on illness, disability or other medical condition of the employee, family member or others must include a completed *CERTIFICATION OF SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITION* Form (Attachment #1) or other document containing similar information from the attending health care provider which supports the request for absence.

**NOTE: Clarification may be required from the employee and/or attending health care provider prior to a determination being made on the request for the leave of absence without pay.**

### REVIEW

1. Requests for leaves of absence without pay will be reviewed and determinations made based on the following:

- 1.1 reasons for the leaves of absence without pay;

- 1.2 amount of time requested;

- 1.3 employees' documented performance, behavior and attendance records;

- 1.4 needs of the organization;

- 1.5 employees' years of service; and,

- 1.6 previous accommodation efforts by the organization.

## LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY (continue)

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2. Leaves of absence without pay are generally approved only for medical reasons when employees are reasonably expected to be able to return to work. Leaves of absence without pay should be for short periods of time unless extraordinary circumstances support a longer period of time. They will **not** be approved for reasons including, but not limited to, the following:
  - 2.1 attending school (unless attendance is short-term AND directly benefits the CBH);
  - 2.2 relocation;
  - 2.3 incarceration; or,
  - 2.4 accepting another job.
3. The District Personnel Office will provide written decisions to employees concerning requests for leaves of absence without pay.
4. If a leave of absence without pay is approved, the notification is to specify the terms and conditions of the approval, including the following:
  - 4.1 the type of leave of absence without pay that has been approved (regular or contingent),
  - 4.2 the beginning and ending dates, and
  - 4.3 the terms for return (e.g., return-to-work statement from the attending health care provider).
5. The written approval of a **regular** leave of absence without pay must identify the location and job(s) which will be available for employees' return to work.

**NOTE: In order to be considered a "suitable vacancy," a position must be properly established, budgeted and have no other restrictions that must be resolved prior to filling the vacancy.**

7. If an employee requests a regular leave of absence without pay, and it is determined that it will not be approved, the District Personnel Office must notify the employee that the request is denied.
  - 7.1 Authorized officials may offer to employees, if appropriate, the opportunity to request a contingent leave of absence

## LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY (continue)

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without pay.

- 7.2 Authorized officials do not have the authority to place employees on contingent leaves of absence without pay when a specific request has not been received from the employees, except as provided in REQUEST SECTION.

### **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

Employees who are absent from work due to work-related injuries, illnesses and/or exposures to occupational disease covered under workers' compensation may request to be placed on unpaid family and medical leave, if appropriate, or leave without pay, rather than use accrued leave to cover the absence. The *SELECTION OF PAYMENT OPTION* Form (Attachment #2) must be completed and submitted to the District Personnel Office. Employees cannot receive both workers' compensation payments and salary due to using accrued leave for lost work time.

### **BENEFITS**

1. While on leaves of absence without pay, employees may maintain health insurance coverage through the State Health Benefit Plan and continue their benefits through the Flexible Benefits Program.
2. Employees with at least one year of participation in the Group Term Life Insurance Program under the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) may retain coverage while on leaves of absence without pay. A request to continue coverage must be made in writing to ERS prior to beginning the leave of absence without pay. Coverage terminates if this written request is not filed.

**NOTE: Employees who accept employment outside of State government are not eligible to continue coverage.**

### **TIME LIMITATIONS**

1. Regular and contingent leaves of absence without pay should be approved for short periods of time, unless specific circumstances support approving a longer absence. Approval cannot exceed twelve (12) months. (See **EXTENSIONS**)
2. A continuous leave of absence without pay cannot exceed twenty-four (24) months. A continuous leave of absence without pay may include any combination of the following:
  - ◆ authorized (regular),
  - ◆ contingent (and any approved extensions),
  - ◆ short-term/other, and
  - ◆ unpaid family and medical leave.

## LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY (continue)

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### RETAINING ACCRUED LEAVE

Employees may request that accrued leave (all or part) be retained while on leaves of absence without pay. Authorized officials should consider the reasons for the leaves of absence without pay and the length of time requested before approving a request to retain accrued leave.

### RETURN TO WORK

1. Employees must notify authorized officials, verbally or in writing, of their intent to return to work. This notification must be received prior to the expiration of the leave of absence without pay. Specific notification instructions will be included in the approval notification. (e.g., notice will be required in writing, specific deadline date for receiving notice, need for release to return to work, etc.)
2. Prior to employees returning to work from leaves of absence without pay due to their own illness, disability or medical condition, employees **must** provide a release to return to work statement from the attending health care provider to the authorized official.
  - 2.1 The statement must certify that the employee can resume the essential functions of the job, without restrictions or with restrictions that can be reasonably accommodated.
  - 2.2 Each health care providers' statement indicating work accommodations will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
  - 2.3 Failure of the employee to comply with these requirements may result in separation from employment.
3. Employees may request to return to work prior to the expiration of approved leaves of absence without pay. Authorized officials may approve requests for early return to work unless specific circumstances prevent approval.
4. Upon return from leaves of absence without pay, employees retain previously accrued and unused leave.
5. In order for employees to return to work from a contingent leave of absence without pay, a "suitable vacancy" must be properly established, budgeted and have no other restrictions that must be resolved prior to filling the vacancy.

### EXTENSIONS

An extension of a leave of absence without pay beyond the 12-month limitation may be approved by authorized officials if determined appropriate. If an extension is approved, it will be on a contingent leave of absence without pay basis only. Such an extension should be for a limited period of time and cannot be approved for more than twelve (12) months.

## LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT PAY (continue)

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**NOTE: An extension will be granted only for the employee's medical reasons and when the employee's condition and other factors indicate that the employee will be able to return to work.**

1. Employees are to request extensions in writing. Only requests for a contingent leave of absence without pay will be considered.
2. Requests for extensions must be accompanied by a statement from the attending health care provider which supports the request for the continued absence.
3. The District Personnel Office will notify employees of approval or denial of requests in writing, and will include the conditions of return.
4. If an extension is approved, a statement will be included in the notice that approval of the request for extension does not extend health insurance coverage under the State Health Benefit Plan. The State Health Benefit Plan will provide information regarding continuing coverage through COBRA.
5. Employees must notify their immediate supervisor, verbally or in writing, of their intent to return to work as provided in **RETURN TO WORK SECTION**.

### **CREDITABLE SERVICE TOWARD RETIREMENT**

Members of ERS who are on leaves of absence without pay due to a physical or mental illness, sickness or disorder caused by a job-related disease/accident may submit a request to purchase up to twelve (12) months of service in a five (5)-year period by paying employee contributions plus interest within the first six (6) months of return to duty.

For additional information or assistance, please contact the District Personnel Office at 706/272-2342.

Attachment #1 – *CERTIFICATION OF SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITION*

Attachment #2 – *SELECTION OF PAYMENT OPTION*