Questions and Answers about the 2026 Budget Temporary Exception

1% Reduction/Holiday Hours

Q: If any of the additional 21 Holiday hours are unused in 2026, will they be rolled over?

A: A: Yes. The 21 additional holiday hours will be added to the employee's holiday leave bank. Per the Employee Benefit Handbook, when holiday credits are not used within the payroll year in which they are earned they may be carried over to succeeding payroll years. There is no cap on an employee's holiday leave bank.

Q: With the 1% reduction, will employees continue to receive step and longevity increases?

A: Yes. The 1% reduction to the wage scale does not prevent employees from receiving step increases. Additionally, nothing in this exception limits longevity pay.

Q: How will the 1% wage reduction impact longevity credits? Will the 1% be applied before or after the % from longevity is added?

A: Longevity credits continue to accumulate as normal.

The 1% affects the base-rate salary and if an employee is in a group where longevity is paid in addition to their base rate, longevity pay will be paid on top of the reduced base wages.

*Example: John Smith's base-rate in 2025 was $31.00 and John earns 6% longevity pay ($31.00 * 6% = $1.86) for a total of $32.86. With the 1% base wage rate decrease effective pay period 1 of 2026, his new base wage rate will be $30.69 and John will continue to earn 6% longevity pay from his base-rate salary ($30.69 * 6% = $1.84) for a total of $32.53.*

Retirement Incentive

Q: If I have already given a retirement date, can I change it to be within the window of this temporary exception?

A: It depends on when an employee has given their retirement date. Dane County Ordinance §18.29(12) says a resignation is binding 3 days after its receipt and the employee shall not have the privilege to withdraw the resignation except by consent of the appointing authority. If an employee is still within their three-day window, the employee can change their retirement date. If the employee is outside of that window, the employee will need to make a request to their Department Head to modify their retirement date.

Q: If I have already given a retirement date and it is within this window, will I be eligible for the incentive?

A: Yes, the Exception makes a provision for this.

Q: Is the Retirement Incentive an increase to current sick leave balances?

A: If an employee retires within the window, the county will add an additional 6% to an employee's sick leave and sabbatical banks at the point of retirement. That amount can exceed the respective bank limits.

Employees who are not retiring within that window do not receive any increases to their leave banks.

Voluntary Time Away

Q: How will the use of voluntary time away impact insurance premiums, vacation and sick time earned, and WRS contributions and years of service?

A: Insurance premiums are unaffected by the use of voluntary time away.

Employees who volunteer for voluntary time away will continue to receive non-salary fringe benefits (health and dental insurance, disability insurance, longevity credits, sick leave accrual, and vacation accrual) provided under the Employee Benefit Handbook on the same basis as if working.

While you are on unpaid voluntary leave, you do not receive earnings. WRS contributions—both the employee share and the employer share—are based on actual earnings. If there is no pay, no WRS contributions are made for that period. This means your WRS account balance will grow more slowly in any year when voluntary unpaid leave is taken.

An Employee's WRS service time may be reduced to less than a full year by using voluntary time away. WRS calculates "creditable service" (your years of service toward retirement) based on hours worked and paid. During unpaid voluntary leave, you are not earning service hours, so you may earn less than a full year of WRS service credit.

Q: Can voluntary time away be used even if an employee has paid leave available?

A: Yes. The voluntary time away program is designed for employees who voluntarily want to work at a reduced capacity (less than their current FTE) and want to continue receiving benefits as if they are working. The use of voluntary time away is based on department head approval and is on first-come, first serve and seniority basis.

Q: How much voluntary unpaid time can be taken?

A: No more than 90 days can be requested.

Q: What's the minimum amount of voluntary unpaid time that can be requested?

A: Four hours.

Q: Will our hourly wage be adjusted to reflect how much time we request similar to how it was done when this was offered during the 2020 pandemic?

A: This depends on how an employee requests to use voluntary time away. A reduced wage rate that is spread across the year is an option. However, employees electing to retire cannot use the option to spread the cost over the entire year.

Further, in 2020 the county also provided an incentive to use Voluntary Time Away and this exception does not provide an incentive.

<u>Other Questions</u>

Q: Who does this exception apply to?

A: This exception would modify all of the Employee Benefit Handbooks (EGs 65, 705, 720, 895, 1871, 2634, Attorneys and Trades). Any employee that receives benefits through the Employee Benefit Handbook or conferred the same benefits as contained in the Employee Benefit Handbook through resolution (Managers, Department Heads), would receive these benefits. Employees who receive their benefits through collective bargaining (WPPA and WPPA Supervisors) are not eligible to receive these benefits.