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## Seattle Department of Human Resources

### BENEFIT ENROLLMENT DEADLINE EXCEPTION POLICY

This document identifies when exceptions may be made to allow employees to make benefit election changes outside of an enrollment period. Although enrollment deadlines are widely communicated before and during the enrollment period, occasionally circumstances occur beyond an employee's control that may make timely enrollment extremely problematic, generating a request for an enrollment exception. To recognize unforeseen emergencies and still comply with IRS rules, the City has identified several enrollment deadline exceptions below which may meet the criteria of "unforeseen" and "emergency".

- 1. Out of the Area for the Entire Enrollment Period:** An employee may be out of the area for the entire open enrollment period; this would include employees on leave, such as military or sabbatical leave. Qualifying Example: An employee is on military leave for the entire open enrollment period and does not have a power of attorney document on file that authorizes another individual to make benefit changes for the employee. The returning employee will be allowed to make plan changes. Unqualified Example: Inability to log into the City's enrollment system while out of the area for shorter periods with limited or unpredictable Internet access.
- 2. Illness for Most of the Enrollment Period:** An employee may be out of the office due to illness for most (75% or more) of the enrollment period; this includes employees on extended Family/Medical leave. Qualifying Example: An employee who was certified off from work due to their workers' compensation claim/on workers' compensation time loss for most of the period is eligible to make a change following the enrollment deadline. Unqualified Example: A brief period of illness during open enrollment or an employee with a workers' compensation claim who was working light duty/on partial time loss but was working for 25 percent of the open enrollment period.
- 3. Technical Difficulties:** Qualifying Example: An employee who is unable to access the HRIS web portal (Workday) and provides time-stamped documentation, such as an IT ticket, screenshot of the failure or attempt to make changes, or an email to their Benefit Representative stating that they are experiencing technical difficulties and unable to make a change. The timestamp must be before the deadline on the last day of the enrollment period. Unqualified Example: Expired passwords or failure to "save" changes in Workday.
- 4. Communication Barriers:** Employees who have communication challenges such as limited English ability or a learning disability may qualify for an enrollment exception. Qualifying Example: Employees that receive incorrect or no written information from an otherwise reliable source. Unqualified Example: If there is a significant body of correct, written material available or given to the employee, oral misinformation will NOT justify an enrollment exception.
- 5. Other Unusual Circumstances Not Covered Above:** Other unusual circumstances may occur that prevent employees from contacting their Benefits Representative or logging into the system to make benefit elections. The Benefits Unit will confer with the Benefits Manager to evaluate these situations, considering the unanticipated nature and severity of the interfering event.

**Procedure:**


In all the situations listed above, employees must first contact their department's Benefits Representative to review the appropriateness of their request. However, department benefits and human resources representatives cannot grant enrollment exceptions.

If the employee meets the criteria defined in the policy, they may request a formal exception request by completing an Exception Request Form. Benefits Unit staff will review requests on a case-by-case basis to confirm the validity of the request for an enrollment deadline exception. Information reviewed may include system audit reports, relevant emails, Employee Self-Service pages, and payroll entries. The Benefits Unit may also request a copy of the employee's "Summary of OE Elections" as supporting documentation.

If a change is allowed, the new election must be submitted no later than ten (10) business days after the enrollment exception request is approved.

If the employee is unsatisfied with the Benefits Unit decision, the decision may be appealed to the Benefits Manager. If the employee is still not satisfied with the outcome, disputed decisions will be referred to the Director of the Human Resources Department or their designated representative for final decision-making.

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Amanda Grumbach (Nov 25, 2024 09:33 PST)

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Amanda Grumbach, Director  
Shared Administrative Services

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**Seattle Department of Human Resources**

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