



## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR  
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT  
WASHINGTON DC 20420

JUN 29 2012

### HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT LETTER NO. 05-12-07

#### **Temporary Stand Down on Change to Lower Grade Actions**

**1. Purpose.** This Human Resources Management Letter (HRML) provides guidance and instructions regarding a temporary suspension of certain actions to change employees to lower grades, the establishment of a Classification Oversight Working Group to determine the underlying causes and possible solutions regarding an increasing number of change to lower grade actions across the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and new procedures for involuntary change to lower grade actions.

**2. Background.** There is a great awareness across the Department of involuntary changes to lower grade resulting from incorrect classifications and failure to act on Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification appeal decisions in a timely manner. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is in the process of establishing Consolidated Classification Units (CCUs). The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) has begun a standardized position description (PD) process to reduce this problem throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the long term. VA will fully explore all options to minimize any possible adverse impact on employees during the standardization process.

**3. Guidance.** Effective immediately, Human Resources Officers (HROs) are to cease processing involuntary change to lower grade actions related to classification correction issues. This is a temporary measure while an action plan is developed to address classification issues throughout VA. To that end, a Classification Oversight Working Group has been established to create options on how to balance position classification standards and equal pay for equal work with the potential number of resulting changes to lower grade. This group will identify which appeal decisions have not yet been acted on, and the impact of known OPM appeal decisions, CCUs and PD standardization. The group will review these positions to determine which changes to lower grade actions will proceed.

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#### 4. Required Actions

a. Effective immediately and until further notice, HROs are to cease processing involuntary change to lower grade actions related to classification correction issues for all employees. **Changes to lower grade for inappropriate conduct, unacceptable performance, or at the request of an employee are still permissible.** The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) will monitor grade changes in the PAID system to ensure compliance.

b. In order to ensure that OHRM has central awareness of any and all classification disputes, we are instituting a new procedure that requires HROs to notify the Compensation and Classification Service immediately whenever they learn that an employee is appealing the classification of his or her position directly to OPM, or that a VA appeal will be forthcoming. Notification must include the occupation series, position title, and current grade of the position, as well as information regarding how many similar positions exist at the facility. Notifications may be sent via email to [vacoclassif@va.gov](mailto:vacoclassif@va.gov). Also, as required by existing VA policy, a duplicate copy of all material provided to OPM must be provided to OHRM.

c. Upon termination of the stand down on change to lower grade actions, all future involuntary change to lower grade actions will require OHRM concurrence prior to effecting the action. Requests for concurrence should be sent to the Compensation and Classification Service at [vacoclassif@va.gov](mailto:vacoclassif@va.gov), and must include a copy of the existing and proposed position descriptions, the evaluation statement, and any other pertinent information. This requirement will be incorporated into VA Handbook 5003, Classification.

**5. Questions.** Questions regarding this HRML may be directed to Deonne Pitts, Acting Director, Compensation and Classification Service, at 404-327-4930 or at [vacoclassif@va.gov](mailto:vacoclassif@va.gov).



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