

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Benefits Administration

VBA - AFGE Memorandum of Understanding

**Joint Announcement of Adoption of a Certification Program
for Certain Employees of Veterans Service Center**

This Memorandum of Understanding between the Veterans Benefits Administration and AFGE National VA Council #53 is for the purpose of jointly announcing adoption of a certification program within VBA for certain employees of the Veterans Service Center.

This certification program will demonstrate the skills obtained as the result of quality training and the expertise achieved by our current and future employees. There will be no adverse impact on employees as the result of implementation of this program.

1. A certification program will be established for the Veterans Service Representative /Veterans Claims Examiners (VSR/VCE) GS-11, Rating Certified Veterans Service Representative/Rating Specialists (RCVSR/RS) GS-12 and Decision Review Officer (DRO) GS-13 positions. AFGE and VBA will discuss and negotiate as appropriate, expansion of the certification program to other grades and positions should that be proposed in the future.

2. VBA commits to a standard of excellence in the quality and quantity of training for all employees. We will ensure training programs, which are the core and prerequisite to certification, are complete and sufficient to provide employees the necessary tools to become certified. There will be a direct relationship between the training program and certification. During the training program employees will be provided continual feedback on their progress. At least 60 days prior to completion of the training program, the supervisor will meet with the employee to provide formal feedback, as provided in Article 22 of the VA/AFGE Master Agreement.

3. Certification is the capstone or culmination of the training process. Employees will proceed through standardized training such as the TPSS program, which may include pre and post tests for the purpose of determining the efficacy of training. Training will include mentoring, on-the-job-training and ongoing feedback. The terminal phase of training will be certification. Certification describes a work sample review process which will demonstrate that the employee who

has completed training has the requisite skills and abilities to successfully perform the duties of his/her position. Upon successful completion of the training program and after input from their supervisor, employees may decide when to take the certification test. It is expected that those individuals who perform technical reviews, associated with the work sample review, will also be certified. Within 5 years of implementation of the certification process for each position, all technical reviews for that position will be performed by certified individuals.

4. Certification will be accomplished by completion of a work sample nationally developed by VBA and its union partners. The work sample will be scored in accordance with a national standard. Employees who successfully complete the training program and achieve certification will be considered to have attained the necessary skills and competencies as discussed in the VA/AFGE Master Agreement, Article 22, Section 4(A)(1).

5. If an employee is unable to complete certification, they will be placed in training to cover those areas in which they may be deficient and then retake the certification work sample. If an employee is unable to pass certification after all appropriate assistance, the provisions of the VA/AFGE Master Agreement, Article 22 Section 4 (B) are applicable. For non-incumbents (employees below the GS-11 level) certification is appropriately considered part of the training program associated with the training opportunity and successful completion is necessary before promotion to the GS-11, GS-12 and GS-13 levels.

6. Incumbent employees are those currently serving as GS-11 Veteran Claims Examiners/Veterans Service Representatives, GS-12 Rating Specialists/Rating Certified Veterans Service Representatives, GS-13 Decision Review Officers and Hearing Officers. Where incumbent employees have not been performing the full range of duties due to specialization or for other reasons, at the employees request, we will ensure that they are provided training sufficient for them to participate in the certification program.

7. Incumbent employees will not be required to complete the certification work sample. However, these employees will be encouraged to participate in the certification program. Certification will demonstrate to veterans and stakeholders that our employees possess the skills and competencies needed to provide the quality service we are committed to providing. Participation in the certification program will be considered a major accomplishment and will greatly promote the mission of our organization. A Special Contribution Award will be provided to incumbent employees who

voluntarily, successfully complete certification. Those incumbents who successfully complete certification upon their first try will receive a \$500 award; those who achieve certification upon their second try will receive \$250 and \$100 will be available to those who achieve certification upon their third try. Such Special Contribution Awards will not be provided after two years from the date the Certification Program is implemented. The number of opportunities an incumbent will have to achieve certification will be limited to two per year.

8. Certification is not a part of the employee performance evaluation process and will not be considered in making determinations related to performance or discipline. Whether incumbent employees attempt certification unsuccessfully or if they elect not to participate in the certification program will not be considered part of the employees' performance evaluation. Certification will not be required as a prerequisite to apply for any position within VBA but may be a consideration for selection.

9. Since certification will provide for standardized and on the job training it is expected that, over time, the basic duties and responsibilities of the positions for which certification will be required will become more standardized across the nation. There may, however, be variance due to additional duties assigned, depending on the needs of each facility and the veterans served. This National Certification Program will be the exclusive certification program for these positions within VBA. When the certification process has been designed and implemented for a specific position requiring certification, all local certification programs or programs intended for similar purposes, will be replaced by the National Certification Program described above.

10. A copy of this MOU will be furnished to the Local President of all VBA facilities represented by AFGE. Local unions will be given the opportunity to bargain over appropriate issues not otherwise in conflict with this or other national level agreements, prior to local implementation.

/S/ Veronica Wales
For Management
For the NVAC

/S/ Alberta Franklin

Date: January 20, 2000:

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