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## Correspondence Memorandum

**Date:** June 10, 2020

**To:** ETF Executive Committee  
Employee Trust Funds Board  
Teachers Retirement Board  
Wisconsin Retirement Board

**From:** Pam Henning, Assistant Deputy Secretary

**Subject:** COVID-19 Pandemic Update

**This memo is for informational purposes only. No Board action is required.**

The Department of Employee Trust Funds (ETF) began implementing work from home (WFH) provisions in early March in response to increasing concerns over the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). ETF's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) Team had been monitoring guidance on community-wide-spread from the federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the WI Department of Health Services (DHS). By March 17, after one day's notice, nearly all ETF staff were WFH. Once Governor Evers' Safer at Home orders became effective on March 26, ETF designated only essential onsite staff (about 20 staff) to continue to provide necessary business functions such as mail services, scanning and indexing retirement and other benefit related documents, preparing and printing retirement estimate information for members, and ensuring checks to members and vendors were distributed timely.

As a result of the Governor's Safer at Home orders and social distancing guidelines, ETF's physical offices at the Hill Farms State Office Building (HFSOB) closed to the public in March and remain closed. However, ETF's daily operations and services have not been interrupted. We have been able to efficiently provide customer service, education, and application or transaction processing remotely. All in-person, retirement appointments were switched to virtual or over-the-phone appointments.

ETF staff successfully transitioned to WFH with no interruption in ETF's critical business processes. This is a result of past practices in place to provide flexible WFH options for

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staff. ETF's COOP Plan requires assigned staff to log in at home every 14 days. Staff were able to continue services to our members without interruption by taking their laptops home, with only some staff needing additional hardware and equipment such as extra monitors, webcams and keyboards or obtaining chairs from the office. From the beginning, ETF staff were required to complete a Morning Report to indicate their daily work status. These Morning Reports give leadership a full view of the agency's staffing levels by tracking illness or staff loaned for assistance to other agencies. In past years, ETF's COOP Team has conducted periodic exercises of this type of status reporting, so ETF staff were therefore familiar with this requirement.

### **ETF Communication Efforts**

Over the past several months, ETF has been sharing timely communications with members and employers about the impact of COVID-19 on retirement, insurance, and other benefits administered by ETF. We also set up a [COVID-19 resource center](#) on the ETF website to address frequently asked questions on benefits-related topics. Other avenues of communication have been through the May member newsletters and social media such as Twitter and LinkedIn to provide awareness about the status of benefits and ETF services, promote overall health and wellness, and highlight upcoming educational offerings.

ETF also has ensured staff were well informed and had online resources available to help with working remotely, including topics such as navigating IT equipment, mindfulness and managing stress, and more specific details from the CDC on practicing good hygiene, use of masks, etc. ETF's security team has regularly shared information with staff about IT security, with special emphasis on tips for working securely from home. In addition, ETF's Human Resources Office provided updates to staff on state and federal COVID-19 leave benefits such as Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL) and Expanded Family Medical Leave (EFMLA) for eligible ETF employees, EAP resources for supporting employees and their families, and wellness activities such as virtual yoga.

During the pandemic, other state agencies have been reaching out for assistance with unemployment compensation claims and contact tracing efforts. ETF has assisted by deploying up to 10 staff to perform recruitment functions for the Department of Workforce Development with hiring hundreds of temporary staff to manage the unprecedented demand for unemployment insurance and for the Department of Health Services with COVID-19 contact tracing efforts. The last of our deployed staff will return to their regular ETF jobs at the end of June.

### **ETF's Bounce Back Plan**

In step with the [Governor's Bounce Back Plan](#), DOA moved to Phase 1, allowing staff not able to WFH the ability to return to the office. ETF has prepared a Bounce Back Plan encompassing the three phases of the statewide plan for returning staff to work at the Hill Farms State Office Building. ETF's philosophy is to move incrementally with emphasis on workforce safety and maintaining business continuity. We have the capability to continue to WFH. Productivity has actually increased with staff working remotely, and our members still have access to all ETF's services; just virtually instead

of in-person. As part of our phased approach, ETF will not have any in-person internal or external public meetings from now until the end of the calendar year. As part of ETF's Phase 2, we will begin allowing staff to voluntarily return to the office at a very reduced capacity with strict hygiene and other sanitation protocols in place. Our third phase will allow more staff to return to the workplace and potentially provide public-facing contact with members, with ongoing specific hygiene and other social distancing procedures in place for everyone's safety and well-being. ETF's Bounce Back Plan is very flexible and will consider all guidance from federal and state government resources before moving from one phase to another and is poised to reverse course if necessary.

Lastly, as part of the ETF COOP Team's eagerness to learn from this uncharted pandemic event, we surveyed several groups of staff and supervisors to gain feedback and lessons learned to make ETF's continuity plans even stronger. Results from the various surveys indicated ETF was well positioned to WFH. Technology with laptops and VPN was in place, and instructions, transparency and communication updates were provided timely. ETF is adjusting its Plans to include any additional feedback as appropriate.

I will be available at the Board meeting to answer questions.