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Correspondence Memorandum

Date: May 23, 2019

To: Employee Trust Funds Board
               Teachers Retirement Board
               Wisconsin Retirement Board

From: Anne Boudreau, Deputy Administrator
               Division of Retirement Services

Subject: Retirement and Customer Service Update

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

This document provides information about current activities in the Division of Retirement Services, including workload demand, customer feedback and process improvement projects.

Workload Demand

- **Retirement Estimates**

The number of retirement estimates requested and retirement applications received decreased in the first quarter of 2019, as compared to the same quarter in 2018. The number of retirement annuities started increased.

	2018	2019	Change
Q1			
Retirement Estimates Requested	7,482	6,889	-7.9%
Retirement Applications Received	3,139	3,005	-4.3%
Retirement Annuities Started	2,249	2,354	+4.7%

Comparing the first quarter of 2019 to the first quarter of 2018, the average turnaround time for a retirement estimate request increased from 9 days to 11 days. This 11-day average is still within our business goal of 15 days.

Some of the primary factors causing this increase in turnaround time had to do with staff vacancies in the Member Services Bureau and the temporary shifting of some staff

Reviewed and approved by Matt Stohr, Administrator, Div. of Retirement Services

Matt Stohr   Electronically Signed 6/12/19

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resources. Several staff in the Member Services Bureau's "SWAT" team helped the Call Center through its busiest weeks by answering some member calls.

- **Call Center**

Comparing the first quarter of 2018 to the first quarter of 2019, both calls and email decreased. The number of member contacts to the Call Center decreased by nearly 8% overall.

	2018	**2019**	**Change**
Q1			
Calls	52,642	48,655	-7.6%
Email	4,375	4,102	-6.2%
Total	57,017	52,757	-7.5%

The average speed of answer for phone calls in the first quarter of 2019 was 3 minutes, 40 seconds compared to 4 minutes, 30 seconds in the first quarter of 2018. This is consistent with the differences in call volume.

Customer Feedback

- **Compliments for Staff**

Usually in this section of the report we share compliments coming directly from members. In this report are some examples where a supervisor noticed a staff person providing exceptional service to a member.

> *"**Paul** went above and beyond for a member today who came into the office. The member was applying for a retirement benefit while dealing with a divorce. While not part of his normal duties, Paul was able to walk the member through how to get an immediate annuity to preserve his other benefit rights. The member was able to get all of his forms correctly turned in. It was a great example of outstanding member service."*

> *"**Michelle**, I wanted to take a few moments and tell you what a great job you did for member T.N. last week. You did a great job reading between the lines. You did your research, asked questions, and ultimately met with him. Based on his email and voice mail, you were also prepared in the event of a language barrier. Your efforts were noticed!"*

> *"**Steve**, I received a call from a former judge who contacted me about the services you provided. He said he had an appointment with you and some follow-up questions afterwards. He said you are very friendly, patient and knowledgeable about our programs and the needs of members going through the retirement process. Steve - Thanks for everything you do for ETF and*

members. It is appreciated!"

Process Improvement Projects

<u>Annual Reconciliation</u>

Between January 1 and April 15 each year, ETF reconciles employee data submitted by employers. Each member account is reconciled to ensure that all contributions have been paid and the appropriate amounts of hours and earnings have been credited. If there are data discrepancies, ETF contacts the employer and assists in identification and resolution. This process is a prerequisite to generating *Annual Statements of Benefits*, which is one of the most important ways we share information with members each year.

Over the last several years we have shared with you a number of initiatives intended to better educate employers, reduce errors, create self-help options, and reduce the time both employers and ETF staff need to spend on reporting issues. These include:
- Overhauling the employer manual
- Drafting more targeted employer bulletins with timely issue guidance
- Creating a new position dedicated to employer training
- Expanding employer training opportunities
- Implementing the case manager model of service
- Initiating an Employer Compliance Review Program
- Transitioning all employers to the Online Network for Employers (ONE) system for reporting and reconciliation
- Programming enhancements to the ONE system to give employers more autonomy and better accountability
- Documenting the annual reconciliation process more thoroughly
- Setting in action a triage team of "File Experts" to assist with employer file errors during annual reconciliation
- Reaching out to employers by telephone and email to remind them to update information and to prepare for annual reconciliation

This year I would like to share a little more detail about the annual reconciliation process as one way to illustrate the success of this coordinated campaign:
- Annual reconciliation was completed on March 4, the earliest completion date ever documented at ETF
- Staff reconciled data from 1,537 employers for 2018
- Six dedicated case managers completed annual reconciliation, down from nine staff last year and fewer staff than any other year
- For 2018, nearly one-third of employer reports arrived already in balance
- Over the last five years, the number of employer reports arriving in balance improved by a remarkable 29%!

<u>New Staff and Training Model</u>

Recently, twelve new employees began working in the Member Services Bureau. Five are permanent staff filling vacancies and seven are contract staff.

Training new staff is a cooperative effort by trainers from both the Member Services Bureau and the Employer and Contact Services Bureau, which includes the Call Center. The idea is to make staff productive sooner and to build in the capability to temporarily shift these Member Services staff to the Call Center when during peak periods. This model benefits the Call Center, of course, and illustrates the terrific teamwork and positive effort going into training new staff.

This is also informing an adaptive training model, as Call Center staff receive broad training covering all programs administered by ETF and develop more depth of knowledge over time. In the Member Services Bureau this growth typically happens in reverse: Staff receive more in-depth training topic by topic, including benefit calculations. Their breadth of WRS program knowledge is developed over a much longer period of time.

Thus far, two key changes have come out of the new model. First, all new staff in the Member Services Bureau and in the Call Center will receive the same initial training, with a broad overview of WRS programs. Second, some staff in the Member Services Bureau will focus more on meeting with members and less on deskwork. All staff will receive training sufficient to perform their jobs. Some will not receive the same depth of training on benefit calculations as others who are more focused on deskwork.

The benefits are that all new staff to these two units will become productive much more quickly and will have an excellent overview of all WRS programs up front. Taking member calls also provides instant translation of program information to real-life member issues.

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