

As we continue to see COVID-19 cases rise across the nation I thought it would be an important to remind folks about the ability of our members to apply for OWCP benefits.

COVID-19 quarantines and cases in the Postal Service are at levels not seen since early March 2021-- prior to when *Emergency Federal Employee Leave* came into existence. We have also recently been informed in additional deaths of APWU members due to COVID-19.

EFEL expires on September 30, 2021. Barring an extension--which seems unlikely--by Congress, as of the writing of this email, employees diagnosed with COVID-19 could be required to use their own leave to cover absences due to the illness. If an OWCP claim is filed and ultimately approved, it would allow employees to be compensated for lost wages and not have to use all their leave. Also, if a Postal Employee dies from COVID-19, an approved claim will give the employees families OWCP survivor benefits.

When the *American Resue Plan Act of 2021* was passed, it made filing OWCP claims much easier and approval of the claim almost guaranteed.

I have attached a flyer previously sent out by the APWU created by OWCP directed at our membership to encourage them to apply for benefits. Also, below is the text of the previous email I sent out in May regarding the easier claims filing process.

FECA released a new bulletin on the updated procedures for OWCP claims related to COVID-19. The bulletin is FECA Bulletin No. 21-09 *Subject: Processing FECA Claims for COVID-19 under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*. The bulletin describes new procedures claims examiners will follow for COVID-19 claims. Including to re-examine any claims for COVID-19 that were denied. The Bulletin can be found here: [FECA Bulletins \(2020-2024\) | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

### [FECA Bulletins \(2020-2024\) | U.S. Department of Labor](#)

Subject: Telemedicine for Routine Appointments. Background: The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) defines telehealth as “the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support and promote long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, and public health ...

[www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)

îœ'

The bulletin states in part:

On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) was signed into law. This new legislation streamlines the process for federal workers diagnosed with COVID-19 to establish coverage under the FECA. Specifically, Section 4016 of the ARPA provides that a “covered employee” as defined below shall, with respect to any claim made by or on behalf of the covered employee for benefits under the FECA, be deemed to have an injury proximately caused by exposure to COVID-19 arising out of the nature of the covered employee’s employment.

Under Section 4016 of the ARPA, the term “covered employee” means an individual:

- - Who is an employee under Section 8101(1) of title 5, United States Code, employed in the Federal service at any time during the period beginning on January 27, 2020, and ending on January 27, 2023;

- Who is diagnosed with COVID-19 during such period; and
  - Who, during a covered exposure period prior to such diagnosis, carries out duties that—
    - - require contact with patients, members of the public, or co-workers; or
      - include a risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus.
      -
- The bulletin informs claims examiners what to look for when adjudicating these claims.

Vance Zimmerman

Industrial Relations Director

**American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO**