



RETIREMENT SYSTEM



JUDICIAL PENSION PLAN HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook is for members of the Judicial Pension Plan. The Wyoming Retirement System (WRS) also administers seven other pension plans for different groups of employees, as well as the Deferred Compensation 457 Plan. The state statutes authorizing the Judicial Pension Plan are W.S. 9-3-701 through 9-3-713 along with portions of the Wyoming Retirement Act and Uniform Management of Public Employees Retirement Act (W.S. 9-3-401 through 9-3-454) incorporated by reference, as well as the WRS Board's rules.

Pension Plan Basics

Once an employee meets certain qualifications, a pension will provide a monthly payment for life. This type of retirement plan is a "defined benefit" plan because a formula defines the benefit a member receives when they retire.

In contrast to a pension plan is a defined contribution, or 401k-style, retirement plan in which the member specifies, or defines their contribution. With a defined contribution plan, such as the supplemental 457 Plan administered by WRS, the member controls their account and makes their own investment decisions. The benefit they are building is the balance in their account.

A pension has three key features that can work in conjunction with any defined contribution plans:

- I. In most cases, the future benefit grows as long as the member is working for a WRS participating employer and is based on age, salary, and years of service. As years of service and salary increase, so does the future benefit.
- II. The benefit is not generally affected by investment gains or losses. WRS assumes the responsibility for investing all contributions and earnings with the goal of funding the lifelong pension benefit. This is in contrast to defined contribution plans such as 457, 403(b), 401(k) or IRA plans, where the employee is responsible for investment decisions.
- III. A member cannot outlive their benefit, even after they deplete their account balance. Typically, a retiree draws all the funds from his or her account within three to five years of retiring, after which the benefit is paid with WRS investment earnings. In the unlikely event WRS did not have enough assets to pay pension benefits, the state of Wyoming would not necessarily be obligated to make these payments.

Enrolling in the Judicial Pension Plan

All Wyoming circuit court judges, district court judges, and supreme court justices appointed on or after July 1, 1998, are required to participate in the Judicial Pension Plan. The employer will use information an employee provided them to enroll them in the plan.

If a judge were appointed prior to July 1, 1998, and opted into the Judicial Pension Plan, they may have the option to opt out of the plan prior to retirement. Contact WRS for details.

WRS also administers other pension plans for specific groups of employees such as public employees, game wardens, highway patrol officers, DCI investigators, law enforcement personnel, corrections officers, paid firefighters, volunteer firefighters, EMTs, and Search & Rescue. To verify which pension plan a member belongs to, check with their employer or contact WRS.

Keeping Contact Information & Beneficiaries Up to Date

After an employer submits employee information to WRS, an email will automatically be sent to the employee at the email address the employer provided when registering the employee as a pension plan member. It is important that new members log in to their online pension account (outlined later in this handbook) to add beneficiaries and verify information.

Existing members can make changes to contact information and beneficiaries by logging into their online pension accounts. It is important that member contact information is up to date, including using a personal email, to ensure that members receive statements and other correspondence. Forms to complete changes are also available on WRS' website retirement.wyo.gov or by request.

Wyoming RETIREMENT SYSTEM

Log On

Email:

Password:

Log On

Forgot password? [Click here to reset](#)

Don't know the email address used on your account, or are you unable to receive emails there any longer? [Click here to reset your email address](#)

Don't have an account?
No worries.

Register for one now.



RETIREMENT SYSTEM BOARD

Board Members

WRS is administered by an 11-member Board, which includes the state treasurer, two public employees, two employees representing the public school system or higher education, one retired member of WRS, and five qualified Wyoming electors not employed by any participating employer of WRS. All board members, with the exception of the state treasurer, are appointed by the governor for terms of six years. Board members are legally required to act in the best interest of the members of WRS.

Board Responsibilities

The Board holds quarterly public meetings and establishes rules and regulations for administering the pension and 457 plans. The Board employs a director who serves as its secretary and is responsible for managing the staff and daily operation of WRS.

With guidance from the executive director and the chief investment officer, the Board provides oversight on the investment of all retirement funds and monitors the performance of the investment managers hired. The board contracts with an actuarial firm to value the funding levels of each plan and study trends.

The executive director administers the program within the framework of the Board's rules and regulations and the Wyoming Retirement Act. The Board renders final administrative decisions on benefit issues that have been appealed by members.

Wyoming Retirement System is financed from three sources:

- » Contributions from members
- » Contributions from employers
- » Income earned on invested funds

Administrative expenses for the Pensions are paid from WRS funds, while administrative expenses for Deferred Compensation comes from members. Please visit our website retirement.wyo.gov for a list of current board members.

RETIREMENT PLANNING RESOURCES

Estimating Retirement Income Needs

Benefits provided under the pension plans administered by WRS represent one aspect of a member's retirement assets and are not intended to replace 100 percent of their pre-retirement income. Cost-of-living and other benefit increases are not automatically incorporated into a WRS benefit. WRS 457 Deferred Compensation Plan or other retirement plans can help supplement retirement needs.

WRS Retirement Planning Resources

The WRS website at retirement.wyo.gov provides access to a member's WRS retirement online pension and 457 Deferred Compensation accounts. The website also has a wide variety of information, including videos, resource links, and benefit calculators to help project future benefit options.

Additionally, WRS retirement educators provide informational retirement seminars and one-on-one meetings regarding WRS accounts. View the schedule of retirement seminars on our website or contact WRS to schedule an appointment with a retirement educator. Retirement educators are not financial advisors and cannot provide financial, tax or legal advice.

PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS & ACCOUNT

Pension Contributions

The WRS investment team is responsible for investing and managing contributions. Contribution rates for the Judicial Pension Plan are set in state law, while these rates are subject to change, please visit our website for the current rates.

Employers may choose to pay for some or all the required employee's portion of the contribution, in addition to the employer's minimum share. For specific details about how much of the total contribution an employer covers, please contact the human resources or payroll professionals at the organization.

Your Pension Account

A separate account is maintained for each member of WRS showing the amount of contributions and accrued interest. For vested employees, the account balance includes only the employee contributions, plus accrued interest on that balance. The employer contribution is not included in account balances.

In general, a member's account balance is not directly related to their retirement benefit when they are eligible for retirement. Account balances are used to determine refund amounts and pre-retirement death benefits. At retirement, a member's benefit is initially paid from their account balance until it is exhausted. After the account is exhausted, their pension benefit is paid from WRS investment earnings.

For non-vested members hired on or after July 1, 2018, the refundable account balance is defined as contributions the member made out of pocket together with interest on those contributions. Specifically, if an employer chose to pay some of the employee contributions, that amount would not be part of the refundable account balance for a non-vested member. After a person is considered vested, or for purposes of death benefits, the account balance is the entire employee contribution and interest.

Additional funds may not be sent in excess of the contribution rate. Remember, a member's benefit is based on their years of service, salary, and age at retirement.



Increasing Your Pension Benefit Using Service Purchase

Currently employed and vested members of the Judicial Pension Plan may make a one-time purchase of up to five years of service in the plan. Honorably discharged U.S. Military veterans may make an additional one-time service purchase, with the total of both service purchases not to exceed eight years.

If a member makes a service purchase, the purchase will count as timed work, also known as service credit, and it could make the member eligible for the Rule of 85 sooner. A service purchase is a voluntary decision and must be made in a lump sum.

A member can use a non-taxable rollover of assets from other qualified pre-tax retirement savings vehicles, such as 401(k), 403(b), 401(a), 457, or traditional IRA plans, to make this purchase. However, a rollover from after-tax or Roth retirement assets cannot be used for this purpose. For further information and an official service purchase price, contact WRS.

Interest on Your Account Balance

Interest is calculated on non-retiree account balances at a rate determined by the WRS Board and is added to a member's account monthly at a compounded rate. The current rate is posted on the WRS website.

Loans from Pension Accounts

WRS does not allow members to borrow against their accounts. Similarly, a member's account cannot be garnished until they take a refund or start drawing a retirement benefit.

Record Confidentiality

A member's account records cannot be released to any party, including a member's employer, unless the member or court order authorizes such a release in writing.

Accessing Account Information & Statements

A member can access their account information through their online pension account. Members should visit retirement.wyo.gov to log in, and securely view and download account statements, change their personal information, obtain an estimate of their future benefit, request a refund, or submit a retirement request.

Annual account statements are also posted to each member's pension account in their birth month. Members can opt out of the electronic delivery process within their pension account or by contacting WRS.

Each statement provides a wealth of information including the interest accrued on a member's account in the last calendar year, as well as a member's earliest anticipated retirement date. Please note that estimates may vary if the assumptions do not apply to you.



RETIREMENT ELIGIBILITY

Vesting Requirements

After obtaining 36 months of service, a member is eligible to elect a monthly benefit at retirement age. Months of service are calculated based on actual hours worked.

Retirement Eligibility Ages

You are eligible for unreduced (“full”) retirement when:

- The member reaches age 65 and are vested; **or**
- The member reaches age 60 with 20 years of service; **or**
- The member reaches age 70 and have served continuously from the date of appointment to the date you reach age 70.

Taking a Reduced Retirement Benefit

A member is eligible for retirement with a reduced benefit when they reach age 55 and are vested. If a member elects to take a reduced retirement benefit, the full retirement benefit is permanently reduced by 5 percent for each year they are below age 65 with partial years prorated monthly. A member’s benefit will

increase only if the Legislature grants cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) or the member elects a self-funded COLA benefit option.

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT WITH WRS EMPLOYER

If a member returns to work for a participating employer and did not take a refund when they left employment, their pension benefit will begin accruing where they left off. If they took a refund, they have the opportunity to regain that service through a redeposit.

Redeposits

A redeposit re-establishes service credit forfeited by a member who previously terminated employment and took the refund. Members have ten years from the date of re-employment with a participating employer to make a redeposit in a single, lump sum amount determined by WRS. However, a two-year waiting period from the date of re-employment is required before being able to complete a redeposit.

Redeposits can be made with a non-taxable rollover from assets a member has in another qualified retirement vehicle, such as a 401(a), 401(k), 403(b), 457 or a traditional IRA.

Retirement Accounts with Non-WRS Employers

The WRS Judicial Pension Plan is not able to transfer a pension benefit earned from another employer. However, members may be able to roll their other benefits into the WRS 457 Deferred Compensation Plan, subject to IRS guidelines.





LEAVING EMPLOYMENT BEFORE RETIREMENT AGE

Options When Leaving Employment

Leaving funds with WRS: If a member stops working for a participating employer and has an account balance of at least \$1,000, they may leave their account with WRS. Only vested member accounts will continue to accrue interest at the rate set by the WRS Board.

Refund or Rollover: Members may also withdraw or “refund” their account balance or roll it over to an eligible retirement account. A refund does not include the employer share of contributions which remain in the plan. A refund is irreversible, and a member forfeits their service credit and lifetime benefit (if vested).

DEATH CLAIMS & BENEFICIARIES

At the start of employment, each member must log in to claim their online pension account and designate a beneficiary. Members must make separate beneficiary designations for the pension, 457 Plan, and Prudential Life Insurance (if applicable).

Reporting a Death

For member’s loved ones dealing with the loss of a member, this time can be busy and stressful. As soon as they are able, please contact WRS to notify us

of the member’s death by calling (307) 777-7691.

Here is the information we will need for the deceased member:

- Full name, address and birthdate
- Date of death
- RAIN ID or Social Security number
- Caller or informant’s relationship to the deceased
- Primary contact, if different than the informant:
- Name, address and telephone number
- Relationship to the deceased

If You Die Before Retirement:

Not Vested: If the member is still working in the plan and dies before retirement, the beneficiary would be entitled to receive a lump sum payment equal to twice the account balance at the time of the member’s death. If the member is not actively employed, the account balance will not be doubled.

Vested: If the member is vested and dies before retirement, the beneficiary is entitled to receive either a lump sum death benefit or a lifetime monthly benefit (if the member has designated a single primary beneficiary). The benefit would be based on your beneficiary’s age, the member’s HAS and months of service.

In order to receive a lifetime benefit, a spousal beneficiary must be of retirement age. Spousal beneficiaries must begin taking a benefit by the time the member would have reached 72 years of age.

For a non-spousal beneficiary to elect a lifetime benefit rather than a lump sum, the beneficiary must be at retirement age to begin the benefit within one year of the date of your death. Otherwise, the non-spousal beneficiary would only be eligible for the lump sum death benefit. Lump sum payouts to non-spousal beneficiaries or estates taking a lump sum payout must be distributed within five years of the date of death.

If You Die After Retirement:

The beneficiary designated will receive a benefit equal to fifty percent of the member’s benefit until his or her death.

WRS will stop the benefit and recover any electronic payments issued to the deceased the month after the date of death. Please do not close the deceased member’s bank account until the funds have been recovered.

APPLYING FOR RETIREMENT

Choosing a Retirement Date

Members can find their earliest possible retirement date for an unreduced benefit in their statement available through their online account or by calling WRS. However, a member's benefit will increase with every month of service completed. Your retirement date will be the day after your last working day.

Applying for Retirement

Members should log in to their online pension account to apply for benefits on or shortly before their last working day. If a member's last working day changes after a member submits their application, they will need to cancel and resubmit their online application. While online applications are the quickest way to receive a benefit, members may also download a paper application for retirement and submit it to WRS.

WRS provides benefit counseling at any time. Members should not hesitate to contact WRS if they have questions.



Benefit Payout Options

The benefit payout provides a lifetime benefit for the member. Should the member predecease their beneficiary in death, the beneficiary will receive a benefit equal to fifty percent of the member's benefit until his or her death (this is the only benefit option available under the Judicial Pension Plan).

Self-Funded COLA Feature

Members may elect any of the payout options offered by WRS and combine it with a self-funded, cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). It is expected at some point the increases will surpass the amount of a member's initial benefit. Upon death, any applicable continuing benefits will be determined based on the payout option and COLA feature elected.



RETIREMENT PAYMENTS

Timing of Your First Retirement Payment

Once a complete application is submitted, members may expect their first payment the month following the month WRS receives final contributions, and a termination notice from their employer. The first payment will be retroactive back to the retirement date.

Members should speak with their employer to find out when final contributions and termination notices will be submitted to WRS. If members work for a school district, they should find out if the district is paying all summer contributions in advance or paying throughout the summer. This information will help members plan for their anticipated first payment date.

Direct Deposit

Members will be asked to provide direct deposit information when completing their retirement application. All benefit payments are deposited directly to the member's financial institution on the last business day of each month. Each payment represents the member's retirement benefit for the preceding month.

Income Taxes

Monthly benefits are reported to the IRS as income, and members are responsible for paying any taxes. When ready, a Form 1099-R will be added to each member's online account annually for tax reporting purposes.

Members will have the option to include an Income Tax Withholding form when they apply for retirement to indicate how much income tax they want withheld.

State and Federal Withholdings

WRS can now withhold state and federal taxes based upon request. WRS staff cannot furnish tax advice. Members are encouraged to consult with a tax professional or the IRS about withholding elections.

Health Insurance Premium Withholding



WRS can withhold retiree health insurance premiums from monthly retirement checks and forward the money to the appropriate entity. Members arrange this through their employer when they terminate employment. Employers should then submit the necessary information to WRS.

Benefit Increases After Retirement

The decision to grant any cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) or benefit enhancement is made by the Wyoming Legislature. Before a COLA could be granted, statute requires actuarial projections to demonstrate the plan would remain above 100 percent funded after any COLA is awarded.

Pursuant to Wyo. Stat. 9-3-428, although a member has a nonforfeitable interest in their accrued and funded benefits, the state of Wyoming is statutorily obligated only for the contributions required by the Wyoming Retirement Act.

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER RETIREMENT

Rehired Retiree Rule

Retirees who meet certain criteria, including a bona fide break in service, must make an irrevocable election whether or not to continue drawing their retirement benefit when returning to work for a participating employer. That election must be submitted to WRS in writing.



A member must actually be “retired” in order to be eligible to become a “rehired retiree.” There are several factors that determine whether a

member is, in fact, “retired.” Wyoming law and Internal Revenue Service code provisions require a “bona-fide” break in service between a retiree’s retirement date and the date of reemployment in the System. Current Wyoming law requires a break in service for at least 30 days. Additionally, a member is not considered to be retired until the System has received termination notice and final contributions from the employer. Therefore, it may, in fact, take longer than 30 days for a retired member to become eligible to be a “rehired retiree.” **Importantly, a member is not considered “retired” if a pre-existing arrangement to return to work, or any promise of future employment, exists with a participating WRS employer at the time of the member’s retirement.**

In order to continue a retirement benefit, the retiree must meet all criteria outlined in Wyoming Retirement Board Rules and Regulations pertaining to the reemployment of retired members.

If the member elects to discontinue their benefit, they will be reinstated as a contributing member of the plan. They will accrue additional service credit, and their retirement benefit will be recalculated upon their new retirement date. Their new benefit will be based on the same benefit option selected the first time they retired beneficiaries cannot be changed.

As a rehired retiree, a member’s benefit will be calculated under the same tier in which they originally retired. In some cases, their monthly benefit will decrease due to an adjustment based on any payments distributed during the first retirement. Additionally, all cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increases will be eliminated.

If WRS determines that the member does not meet the criteria for continued benefit outlined in Wyoming Retirement Board Rules and Regulations, the member’s retirement benefit will be canceled, and they will be reinstated as a contributing member of the plan.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension and Social Security

At this time, all members of WRS’ Judicial Pension Plan are required to pay into Social Security. The Social Security coverage available to each member will include their service under their WRS participating employer. For complete information about Social Security benefits, contact Social Security at www.ssa.gov.

After a member retires, their pension benefit payment is not subject to Social Security or Medicare withholding.

DISABILITY

If a member becomes incapacitated to the point they cannot perform their duties, they may be eligible for a disability retirement. A “total disability” means a condition rendering the member unable to engage in any occupation for which they are reasonably suited by training or experience, and which is expected to last at least 12 months. A “partial disability” means a condition rendering a member unable to fulfill the occupation for which they are reasonably suited by training or experience, which is expected to last at least 12 months but still allows the member to function in other employment. Contact WRS for more information about applying for a disability retirement benefit.

Disability Retirement Eligibility

To qualify for a disability retirement, a member must have become disabled and apply for disability:

- » While a contributing member of the Wyoming Retirement System;
- » After they have 10 or more years of service; and
- » Before age 60

Disability Benefit Application

Members can begin the application for a disability benefit by contacting WRS. An examining physician(s) must verify the disabling condition. An external company makes a recommendation after reviewing a member’s medical records. Please note that if a member terminates employment prior to submitting a disability benefit application, they will no longer be eligible for a disability retirement. In the event of a contested decision, there are appeal procedures available.

Workers’ Compensation

In most cases, WRS cannot consider payment from workers’ compensation as part of a member’s salary. Being on workers’ compensation may have an effect on a member’s highest average salary and months of service, which are used to determine their pension benefit. Please contact WRS at (307) 777- 7691 for more information.

OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST



17- WRS Judicial Pension Plan Handbook

Military Deployment

If a member is called for active military service while employed and contributing to the Wyoming Retirement System (WRS), WRS rules allow them to receive service

credit for missed contributions upon their return as long as certain requirements are met:

- » Member must return to work with the pre-deployment employer after being honorably discharged.
- » Member must pay any required employee contributions on the service missed to their employer, and the employer will be required to pay their portions of the employee and employer contributions to WRS.*

If military service credit applies, members should contact their employer to make arrangements regarding the missed retirement contributions. Members must provide their DD-214 form verifying honorable discharge and deployment dates.

*There may be funds available from the Adjutant General’s office to help pay the employee and employer portion of the first responders’ contribution. The employer will be notified if these funds are available.

Divorce

WRS has formal rules regarding divorce settlements. WRS requires a Domestic Relations Order (DRO) signed by a judge to split a member’s retirement benefit. If a member’s former spouse is awarded a percentage of the member’s benefit, the member’s monthly retirement benefit will be reduced for their lifetime, even if the former spouse elects to be paid in a lump sum.

If the member divorces after receiving a retirement benefit, the member’s named beneficiary under options 2, 2P, 3, and 3P cannot be changed.

A separate DRO is required to split a member’s 457 Plan account for a divorce settlement. Requirements for a DRO can be found in Wyoming Retirement Board Rules and Regulations.

Life Insurance

Before retirement, members have the option to purchase life insurance. Prudential is the underwriter for the plan. The member may elect to continue this insurance after retirement. If members need more information or need to make any changes to their beneficiary or address information, they should contact Prudential Life Insurance at (800) 525-8056.

Dispute Resolution

Members are entitled to a hearing with the WRS Board regarding any

adverse action, and the Wyoming Administrative Procedures Act (available from the Secretary of State's office) will be followed.

WRS Financial Information

WRS undergoes an audit for each fiscal year ending Dec. 31, and the resulting reports are available on our website. All administrative expenses are paid for from WRS investment earnings. Statutes, rules, modifications to this handbook, and financial and actuarial reports are available at the address below for Plan Administrator and Service of Process:

Wyoming Retirement System
Executive Director
2515 Warren Avenue, Suite 450
Cheyenne, WY 8200

JUDICIAL PENSION BENEFIT TABLE

Years of Service	Salary Replacement Ratio
4	16%
5	20%
6	23%
7	26%
8	29%
9	32%
10	35%
11	38%
12	41%
13	44%
14	47%
15	50%
20	60%
25	65%
30	70%
Ceiling	None

A pension benefit is calculated using a “multiplier” for each year of service. A quick way to estimate a member’s future benefit is to approximate years of service at retirement and apply the multiplier. WRS also has online calculators that can help members approximate their benefit.

SELF-FUNDED COLA OPTION

Statutory COLAs within the Wyoming Retirement System (WRS) are not automatic and require legislative approval when a plan is over 100% funded. The Judicial Plan offers a self-funded option, allowing members to secure a guaranteed annual increase by accepting a lower initial benefit.

Actuarial Trade-off

To remain actuarially neutral, the initial benefit is reduced to offset the higher future payouts.

* Reduction Factor: For every 1% of annual COLA selected, the initial monthly benefit is reduced by approximately 9% to 10%.

Available Rates

Members may select one of three protection levels:

- * 1% COLA: Minimal initial reduction with modest growth.
- * 2% COLA: Moderate reduction and growth.
- * 3% COLA: Maximum initial reduction with the strongest inflation protection.

Timing and Commencement

Per statute, increases typically commence on the July 1 following the two-year anniversary of the retirement date. Members must manage a fixed, reduced income during this initial two-year period.

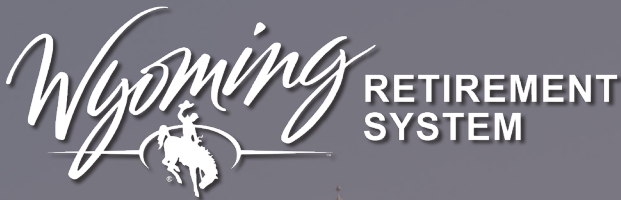
Break-Even Analysis

It typically takes 12 to 15 years for the COLA-adjusted monthly payment to equal the standard “No COLA” benefit. If a member lives beyond this break-even age, the monthly benefit will continue to compound, eventually exceeding the standard benefit.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For a complete picture of WRS retirement benefits and how they work together, visit WRS’ website, where a variety of additional resources are available.

WRS’ retirement educators are available to help you learn about benefits, investing for retirement, and retirement planning. To find out when WRS educators will be conducting seminars in your area, visit retirement.wyo.gov to view the educator travel schedule. WRS staff cannot provide financial, tax or legal advice.



Vision

Partnering to build financial security for members and their families.

Mission

Provide expert administration and responsible investment of Wyoming's public retirement and supplemental savings program.

Values

Integrity, accountability, commitment, excellence.

**2515 Warren Avenue, Suite 450
Cheyenne, WY 82002**

**retirement.wyo.gov
pension@wyo.gov**

307-777-7691

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This publication is intended to serve as a summary of information related to participation in the Wyoming Retirement System 457 Plan. None of the information contained in this publication is intended to supersede or replace any provision of the WRS 457 Plan Document or the laws of the State of Wyoming. This publication and all included materials are not a binding contract. Employees join the 457 Plan, choose investment options, and participate over time on a voluntary basis. Neither the Wyoming Retirement Board nor WRS is responsible for any gains or losses resulting from or alleged to have resulted from, directly or indirectly, the information contained in or related to this publication. No information in this publication should be construed as advice. Employees should consult appropriate professionals for financial, tax and legal advice.