

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers developed in response to the termination of probationary employees.

As retired Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employees, we spent our careers caring for the land and serving people. We value current employees and their work, and care about their well-being. We remain committed to the long-term multiple use and sustained yield mission of the Bureau of Land Management and advocate for its success. We do not advocate for political parties or individuals.

These answers respond to questions we have received from current BLM employees and retirees. The answers we provide represent the best information we have as of the posting of this document. This is a dynamic time, and PLF's members will continue to identify new questions and resources and correct or update answers.

General questions:

- How many Bureau of Land Management employees have been affected in the terminations?
 - According to the information we have been able to obtain, less than 200 probationary employees have been affected.
 - All remaining employees are being affected by the loss of their co-workers and are stressed by the current events.

- How many BLM employees accepted the Fork in the Road offer?
 - This information has not been released. We understand the list is under review, but we have no additional information.

- What is the status of Voluntary Early Retire Authority (VERA) in the agency?
 - We have heard a Voluntary Early Retirement Authorization (VERA) is being considered for the agency.
 - VERA temporarily lowers the age and service requirements to increase the number of employees who are eligible for retirement during periods of substantial restructuring, reshaping, or downsizing. There is no annuity reduction in FERS for employees who retire on an early voluntary retirement under age 55. More information: [OPM VERA Facts](#)

- Will agencies be able to offer Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIP)?
 - This option (along with VERA) is being explored as a potential use.
 - VSIP allows agencies that are downsizing or restructuring to offer employees lump-sum payments up to \$25,000 as an incentive to voluntarily separate. OPM must authorize the use of VSIP before an agency can use. An employee who receives a VSIP and later accepts employment for compensation with the Government of the United States within 5 years of the date of the separation on

which the VSIP is based, including work under a personal services contract or other direct contract, must repay the entire amount of the VSIP to the agency that paid it - before the individual's first day of reemployment. [OPM VSIP Facts](#)

- What impacts will those vacancies have?
 - The impacts from the downsizing of the organization are still being determined. What we know is that managing public lands with fewer employees will result in reduction of the most basic services the agency provides: campgrounds, trails and roads, visitor centers, range/forest management, and fire prevention and suppression. Other work also impacted will likely include fish and wildlife conservation, research, human resource management, budget and other administrative functions.
 - This will likely result in reductions in service to the public, employees, or both.

Affected Employees (Terminated)

- How long will I retain my health insurance benefits? What do I do when those benefits end?

Initially employees' health benefits continue for 31 days after termination and are eligible to elect temporary continuation of coverage; you do not pay premiums for the 31 days. Here is a link to the OPM website which explains temporary continuation of health benefits. [Federal Benefits FastFacts Temporary Continuation of Coverage \(TCC\)](#)

Separating employees can continue TCC for up to 18 months after the date of separation. The cost of TCC includes both the government and employee share plus an administration fee.
- What happens to my life insurance coverage if I am terminated?

Your FEGLI coverage automatically continues for 31 days after your termination date. You do not pay any premiums during these 31 days. More information: [OPM FAQs on FEGLI](#)
- What happens with accrued annual leave/sick leave/comp time if I am terminated?
 - Annual leave should be paid out 2 pay periods after separation.
 - Compensatory time balances should be paid out providing 26 pay periods have not lapsed from the pay period in which it was earned at the time of separation.
 - Sick leave balances are not paid out; the balance is documented on an SF-1150. Sick leave may be restored for employees who are

later reemployed in the federal government. Be sure to keep a copy of your last Leave and Earnings Statement (LES). If you need a copy of your LES or to find out when your leave will be paid out, contact your local Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO).

- I am locked out of the BLM systems. How do I get copies of my paperwork?
 - Contact your local Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO) for copies of your personnel records such as SF 50 Notification of Personnel Action and LES's.

- How do I file a grievance? An appeal? A lawsuit? Can I do all 3? Is there a sequence? What do I need for any of these steps?
 - You may be able to appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), join in a group complaint to the Office of Special Counsel, or take other legal action. Time limits may apply.
 - For help navigating your appeal options, you can contact your union representative if your position was covered in a NFFE or AFGE bargaining unit. You may also contact a private law firm that is assisting federal probationary employees who were terminated (one option to check: <https://www.employmentlawfederal.com/>.) This article from FederalNewsNetwork.com provides additional considerations: [There is help for probationary employees who were terminated](#)

- Can I apply for unemployment in my state?
 - Yes - you can apply. When doing so, be thoughtful about how you work through the application process. If you believe you were wrongly terminated, be sure to find a way to denote that in your application, as some separated employees are being denied benefits due to being terminated for performance.
 - Each state approaches unemployment differently and has different rules regarding eligibility. You may not qualify for unemployment in your state if you were terminated for poor performance. Some states have systems that automatically reject applications if the applicant selects performance as the reason. Instead, people should select an option like "other" or "wrongfully terminated." The goal is to get through the automated system to a person who can review your situation.
 - Your state unemployment office will likely ask for a copy of your termination notice, your SF 50 appointment action or last SF 50 showing your position and salary, as well as your last leave and

earnings statement.

- Should I ask my former BLM supervisor to provide a written reference/ be listed as a reference for my new job search?
 - If you believe that your supervisor valued your work, there is no reason to not ask them for a letter of reference, or for them to be a verbal reference to support you in your job search.
 - Also, if you do not have a copy of your last performance appraisal, you should also ask your supervisor for a written statement that your performance is fully successful or better based on performance standards for your position.

Current Employees

- What should I do in light of the current situation?
 - **Get copies of your personal records.** Download a copy of your eOPF, including SF 50s. Make sure you have a copy of your most recent performance appraisal. If the system is locked, ask your supervisor to provide a written statement on your performance standards and appraisal.
 - **Get copies of all your performance information.** This could be both formal and informal information (e.g. cash award SF 50's that will be part of your eOPF, or the actual hard copy certificate that was provided to you, letters of recommendation or commendation, notes from your supervisor or coworkers about your performance or skills). With the performance system being fully automated, any information that you have from your supervisor outside of the “official system” should be saved in your personal files.
 - **Review your personal finances and monthly bills** in case you are affected by a furlough or reduction in force (RIF). Try to build up your emergency savings to cover 4-6 months of expenses in case you lose your job. Have a back-up plan in case you lose government housing.
 - **Furlough** could be a short-notice action, such as a day or two if Congress fails to fund the government.
 - **Reduction-in-force (RIF)** actions normally require a 30-60 day notice and could involve removal from service, reduction in grade, or a position change or reassignment. The notice should explain your severance pay entitlement ([OPM Severance Pay Fact Sheet](#)), if you are eligible for VERA or [discontinued service retirement](#), and explain your appeal rights to MSPB and EEOC.

- Can I provide a reference for the terminated employees?
 - There is nothing that prohibits you from providing a reference for an employee who worked for you or who you worked with.

- I am stressed and short-staffed. How do I keep delivering service to the American public?
 - First and foremost, take care of yourself.
 - Remember The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has employee support specialists who can help you find resources.
 - EAP can be accessed online or by phone:
 - Call 1-800-869-0276 to speak with a live counselor 24 hours, 7 days a week
 - Member Log-in (Org ID: interioreap): <https://care.espyr.com/>
 - Download the Espyr Connect mobile app on IOS or Android devices

Retirees

- What can I do to help the terminated employees?
 - Offer a compassionate, empathetic ear and listen.
 - Join the Public Lands Foundation (PLF), the National Association of Active and Retired Federal Employees ([NARFE](#)), or another nonprofit association that supports federal employees.
 - If you know someone personally, be a professional reference to help them in their job search. Offer to review their resume.
 - Call or write your congressional delegation to make your concerns known.

- How can I help the BLM nearest me or my former office?
 - Some offices may be interested in your service as a volunteer. You could reach out and share your willingness to help in whatever capacity you can (for example sitting at a front desk).

- What are the retiree groups doing? How can I get involved?
 - National Retiree groups are organizing and sharing information for both current and terminated employees (like this FAQ document).