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Deputy Commissioner

TO: AGENCY PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS

DT: December 23, 2004

RE: General Letter No. 28 revised – Educational Leave of Absence

General Letter No. 27 (dated July 27, 1990) refers to “Educational Leave for Employees in the Classified Service” and discusses the process for approving such leave. DAS Memorandum No. 97-02 (dated January 8, 1997) addresses “Delegation of Authority – Leave of Absence for more than five (5) days with pay” which permitted agencies to approve paid leaves of absence. This new letter is to inform you of some significant changes in the approval process concerning paid educational leaves of absence and the impact of these changes in other areas of the letter (i.e., “Procedure” and “Agency Responsibility”). Changes to General Letter 28 dated May 2000 are indicated in bold type (see pages 2 and 3); clarifying information has been added in bold (second bullet on Page 3) to the letter revised July 2004.

This material supersedes General Letter No. 27 and DAS Memorandum No. 97-02 and all other previous policy statements and clarifying memoranda concerning educational leave of absence. Note: DAS Memorandum No. 97-02 remains in effect for all other paid leaves of absence for more than five days. General Letter No. 27 is abolished.

- ❑ **WHAT IS EDUCATIONAL LEAVE?** Educational leave of absence is leave from regular duties and responsibilities to enable an employee to receive technical training. The training received should increase an employee’s proficiency in his/her position or be for other purposes that are in the best interest of the State. Educational leave may be leave with pay, with partial pay or without pay.
- ❑ **ELIGIBILITY:** Unless superseded by a collective bargaining agreement, only permanent, full-time classified employees are eligible to be approved for leaves of absence, with or without pay, for educational purposes.
- ❑ **EDUCATIONAL LEAVE POLICY:** The educational leave policy and selection procedure of each agency should be in accordance with the guidelines that follow.
- ❑ **PURPOSE:** Educational leaves may be granted to:
 - Gain advanced knowledge and insight into new trends or techniques
 - Increase the professional capacity of the employee and the agency itself
 - Keep abreast of new developments in rapidly changing professional or technical fields
 - Provide needed refresher study or
 - Permit special training in key occupations or occupations for which personnel are in short supply

Educational leave with pay may be granted for:

1. Not more than one academic year of study at a time
 2. Work-study arrangements toward an appropriate degree program
 3. Special training offered by an accredited school or college, federal agency, recognized professional group or acceptable private sponsor
- ❑ **APPROVAL:** An Appointing Authority (or his/her designee) may approve unpaid educational leaves of absence; however, DAS must approve paid educational leaves of absence. All educational leaves of absence for more than five consecutive or aggregate working days in a calendar year must be authorized by the Appointing Authority/designee or by DAS (depending on whether or not the leave will be paid) prior to the employee beginning the requested leave.

Prior to authorizing an educational leave of absence, the Appointing Authority/designee/DAS must determine the following:

- It is not feasible to rearrange the employee's schedule
- Travel time will not be excessive
- Essential services will not be impaired
- An undue burden will not be placed on the agency or on other employees
- The required training cannot be obtained in a more cost effective way

Additionally, the Appointing Authority/designee/DAS should review the work habits of the individual requesting educational leave when considering whether an educational leave of absence will be approved. This may include:

- Demonstrated leadership
- Knowledge of the job
- Satisfactory or better performance evaluations
- Evidence of commitment to State service
- Other qualities indicating the individual and the agency will benefit from additional training

In a large agency or in an agency where the number of employees applying for leaves is significant, the Appointing Authority/designee may appoint a committee to evaluate the qualifications of candidates for extended educational leave. (Extended leave is considered to be an educational leave of absence beyond six months.) Note that certain collective bargaining agreements may require such a committee. The committee shall recommend employees approved for training to the Appointing Authority/designee. If the selections involve educational leaves without pay, the Appointing Authority/designee may then approve such leave of absence provided eligibility/selection criteria are met. If the educational leave(s) of absence are to be with pay, the Appointing Authority/designee may recommend for DAS approval those individuals selected for educational leaves of absence with pay by submitting the name(s) of candidate(s) along with the pertinent information outlined above to DAS.

- **PROCEDURE:** Requests for educational leave, including field-training assignments, shall be submitted to the Appointing Authority/designee and must indicate:
 - Whether or not the coursework is part of a formal degree program and, if so, the degree being sought and the Major field of study;
 - Specific course(s) to be taken during the leave period;
 - Whether or not the course(s) or program is available outside of the employee's normal working hours and, if so, an explanation of why release from work is necessary;
 - How the agency and State will benefit by granting the leave and
 - Whether or not the employee is to be paid during the leave period (fully or partially)

The Appointing Authority/designee shall submit all paid educational leave requests recommended for approval along with all required information listed above to DAS – Attention: Human Resources Specialist assigned to the agency submitting the request. DAS will review the material and approve or deny the request. DAS will then provide a response to the Appointing Authority/designee as soon as practicable. The Appointing Authority/designee shall then notify the employee whether or not the leave has been granted. A Form 301 to process the leave transaction must be submitted to DAS for all approved educational leaves of absence.

When a leave of absence with pay is granted for three months or more, the employee must sign an agreement that upon the termination of such educational leave, he/she will return to employment **within State service provided such appointment is consistent with the intent of the educational leave and is in conformance with State policy and merit system rules.** The agreement shall stipulate that wages are being paid on the condition that the employee will continue working for the **State of Connecticut** on the basis of one calendar year for each full academic year of educational leave granted or pro-rated for any lesser period of time. The agreement shall also specify that should the employee fail to complete his/her obligations under the agreement, the employee shall reimburse the State for up to 100% of wages and expenses paid during the leave period.

The employee shall make arrangements with the educational institution to which he/she is assigned to provide the agency with periodic reports of his/her attendance and progress. Failure to demonstrate satisfactory performance or progress shall be cause for discontinuing the educational leave and taking such other action as may be warranted.

All leaves of absence with or without pay of any duration shall be recorded in the attendance and leave records of the agency. When a holiday is observed by State employees during the school or recess period, employees who are on educational leave with pay shall have the holiday charged in the usual manner with no time in lieu thereof given at a later date.

- **AGENCY RESPONSIBILITY:** Documentation for all educational leaves of absence must be maintained by the agency for an audit conducted by DAS. Such documentation must be available at the time of the DAS Audit and shall include:
 - Employee's request for an educational leave of absence including information outlined under "Procedure" above
 - DAS notification to the agency approving the (paid) educational leave of absence
 - Agency's notification to employee stating approval for educational leave of absence
 - At the conclusion of the leave, the agency shall document that the course or program has been satisfactorily completed. A copy of such documentation (i.e., official course transcript, certificate, diploma, degree, etc.) shall be maintained by the **granting** agency.

- **REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES:** Employee requests for reimbursement of allowable expenses and/or travel in conjunction with an approved educational leave must be processed in accordance with the existing statutory authorities (i.e., Office of the State Comptroller, Collective Bargaining Unit Contract Agreements, DAS Standard Travel Regulations, etc.). The employee on leave with full pay is responsible for all related expenses including tuition, books and travel. **Employees on an unpaid educational leave or educational leave with partial pay remain eligible for reimbursement of these expenses. ("Educational leave with partial pay" means an employee who continues to work in their job while recording time away from work to attend classes as paid educational leave. For example, an employee who is absent from work one day per week in order to attend classes would be considered to be on a leave of absence with partial pay.)**

Please share this information with your staff. Contact your Human Resources Specialist or Shari Grzyb at (860) 713-5176 or via e-mail should you have questions concerning this General Letter.

Alan J. Mazzola

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DEPUTY COMMISSIONER