



VRIP FAQ

*The Information provided in this document are specific to CSEA Bargaining Unit Members and Beneficiaries ONLY. If you are not in a CSEA represented title, you should contact your respective Union or the Onondaga County Employee Benefits Department. *

Q: What is the Voluntary Retirement Incentive (VRIP)?

A. The **VRIP** is an incentive program that allows eligible employees who are **AT LEAST** 55-years of age **AND** have completed **AT LEAST** 5-years of service with Onondaga County, as of February 9, 2020 to retire with special benefits or “incentives”.

Q: Who is eligible for the VRIP?

A: Any Employee who meets the following:

- Has been employed by Onondaga County in a full-time regular line item budget position (excludes 103 positions) on February 9, 2020;
- Be at least 55-years of age and have at least 5-years of service with Onondaga County on the date of separation;
- Opt-in or voluntarily elect to participate in the VRIP no later than **May 29, 2020** by irrevocably tendering resignation from employment within the County’s workforce using an executed form provided by the County Department of Personnel; and
- Actually separate from the County’s workforce between February 10, 2020 and not later than close of business on the respective separation date.

Q: What are the “Special benefits” or “Incentives” offered by this program?

A: Any Employee who irrevocably retires under this incentive program will receive the following benefits or incentives:

- One-time cash payment of **\$5,000** – paid by check as soon as practicable following the completion of all required paperwork and upon actual separation from the County Workforce. *This payment is subject to applicable taxes;
- Guaranteed **15%** Contribution of the Annual Premium Equivalent Rate for Retiree Healthcare for the remainder of your life and your surviving covered spouse should you predecease your spouse. ***NOTE: Retirees must continue to**

make on-time, monthly payments for their Retiree Health Benefits. Failure to do so may result in Termination of benefits;

- **Terminal Leave** as per the CSEA Collective Bargaining Agreement (contract) and/or County Custom and Practice. Your department is responsible for calculating your Terminal Leave and will submit such to Payroll for processing after your retirement date.
 - **TERMINAL LEAVE, Page 36 of the CSEA Contract:** “Upon resignation or retirement, an employee will receive a lump sum cash payment up to a maximum of twenty-one (21) days of earned and unused vacation, eligible floating holidays, personal leave, and compensatory time credits provided that notice of resignation or retirement is on file in the Personnel Department at least two (2) weeks prior to the employee's last day of work. Entitlement for lump sum payment is figured from the employee's last anniversary date and must be certified by the Department of Personnel. The terminal leave entitlement for vacation leave and personal leave are calculated using the Leave Accrual Chart set forth in Appendix ___ E_. The total lump sum payment may not exceed twenty-one (21) days and employees may not be retained on the payroll in budgeted items following the last day of work in order to use any uncompensated credits.
 - As taken from an email response from Carl Hummel, Deputy Commissioner, Onondaga County Department of Personnel in response to LRS Nesci on Tue 4/14/2020 4:49 PM regarding “**County Custom and Practice**”:

“The County Custom and Practice, as it is referred to in the VRIP documents, provides:

If an employee is unable to "burn" enough accrued leave (Vacation Leave, Personal Leave, and Regular Comp Time -- note that FLSA Comp Time is not included in Terminal Leave and is paid out in full per federal regulations) resulting either from, 1) the short time frame for retirement resulting from the VRIP retirement schedule, or 2) denial of leave requests due to operational needs of the department, then the Terminal Leave cap in the contract shall be exceeded and payment made for all unused accrued leave.

***NOTE:** In all cases, future retirees and departments are expected to make every effort to "burn" excess accrued leave prior to the retirement date. Payroll clerks should be consulted by the employee as soon as

possible to calculate the total accrued leave including the amount over the cap so that departments and employees may make the necessary scheduling arrangements. Any questions by employees or departments about this Custom and Practice should immediately be referred to my (Carl Hummel's) attention for clarification.”

Q: Does the \$5,000 cash incentive payment count towards or would it be applied to my pension increasing the “Final Average Salary” or “FAS”?

A: No. Retirement bonuses such as this do not count towards the Final Average Salary or FAS. For more information on Final Average Salary or FAS, please visit, www.osc.state.ny.us/retire or call 1-866-805-0990.

Q: When will I receive the \$5,000 cash incentive?

A: Paid by check as soon as practicable following the completion of all required paperwork and upon actual separation from the County Workforce. *This payment is subject to applicable taxes.

Q: Will the \$5,000 cash incentive be paid by direct deposit?

A: No. It will be paid by check, sent via US Mail and sent to the address that you have on-file with Onondaga County. *Please take this as an opportunity to ensure that the County has your most current and up-to-date mailing address. Contact your Department/Payroll Clerk to do so.*

Q: How much will I be taxed on the \$5,000?

A: Incentive payments are considered bonuses, as such they are subject to the supplemental tax rate – 25% Federal and 9.62% NYS.

Q: Are there any other deductions from this check?

A: No. The only deductions will be Federal and NYS income taxes. Other customary and usual payroll deductions would not apply.

Q: When must I retire from County Service under this incentive?

A: The date that you become eligible will determine your separation date. If you are 55-years of age and have 5-years of County service upon receipt of the “VRIP Waiver, Release and Resignation” letter, you must separate service – “Retire” from County employment on or before, but **NO LATER** than **June 30, 2020**. The following schedule outlines the separation requirements for those who reach eligibility after June 30, 2020:

***NOTE:** If you become eligible after you receive the “VRIP Waiver, Release and Resignation” letter, through June 30, 2020, either by reaching 55-years of age or achieving 5-years of County service, or both during that timeframe, you must retire by **June 30, 2020** in order to receive this incentive.

- Becomes eligible between July 1, 2020 and July 31, 2020, must retire by **July 31, 2020**;
- Becomes eligible between August 1, 2020 and August 31, 2020, must retire by **August 31, 2020**;
- Becomes eligible between September 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020, must retire by **September 30, 2020**;
- Becomes eligible between October 1, 2020 and October 31, 2020, must retire by **October 31, 2020**;
- Becomes eligible between November 1, 2020 and November 30, 2020, must retire by **November 30, 2020**;
- Becomes eligible between December 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020, must retire by **December 31, 2020**;

***NOTE: The absolute last day of the VRIP is December 31, 2020.**

- Also, any individual that participates in the VRIP who reaches a “NYS Retirement Milestone” as defined below, on or before December 31, 2020, must leave the County’s workforce no later than the end of the month in which the individual reaches said milestone. For purposes of this incentive program, a “NYS Retirement Milestone” shall be defined as:

“an individual who will reach 20-years of service for 75i, A14, A15, and 552 NYS Retirement plans; 25-years of service for 89k NYS Retirement plans; or 30-years of service for 75i, A14, and A15 NYS Retirement plans, in the NY State & Local Retirement System (NYSLRS).”

Individuals that claim a milestone with the NYSLRS must provide verification of such a milestone on a form acceptable to the County.

***NOTE:** Individuals needing to determine which NYSLRS plan they are enrolled in should visit, www.osc.state.ny.us/retire or call **1-866-805-0990**.

***NOTE:** In **ALL** cases or scenarios, you **MUST** return your signed and notarized letter to the Onondaga County Personnel Department **NO LATER** than **5:00pm on May 29, 2020!** Also, letters that are being returned via USPS Mail **MUST** be postmarked **NO LATER** than **May 29,2020!**

Onondaga County Personnel Department
Duane Owens, Commissioner
John H. Mulroy Civic Center
421 Montgomery Street, 13th Floor
Syracuse, New York 13202-2959

Q: What if I don't hit a Milestone until after May 29, 2020? When do I turn in my letter?

A: You will still need to turn in your letter by May 29, 2020 as specified in the answer above. **For example:** If an individual will hit a 20-year milestone on November 5, 2020, the individual **must** provide the paperwork including verification of the milestone **NO LATER** than May 29, 2020 and must separate or retire from the County's workforce **NO LATER** than November 30, 2020.

Q: What is acceptable as proof of my NYSLRS Milestone?

A: Any form or letter from the NYS Office of the Comptroller or NY State & Local Retirement System that displays or demonstrates the claimed milestone. Examples are; NYSLRS Estimate forms and NYSLRS Annual Statements.

Q: Is May 29, 2020 the only day that I can submit the signed and notarized acceptance form?

A: No. The form may be submitted any time between when you receive your "*VRIP Waiver, Release and Resignation*" letter, up to and including May 29, 2020.

***NOTE:** Federal Law requires that the County provide you 45 calendar days from the receipt of the letter to review its terms. However, you are **NOT** required to wait the entire 45-days if you chose not to.

Q: Can I revoke my participation in the VRIP after I've already signed and turned it in?

A: Yes. You will have **7 calendar days** from the date you submit the signed and notarized acceptance form to revoke your decision. All revocations **MUST** be in writing and addressed to the Commissioner of Personnel. If you mail your revocation to the

Commissioner of Personnel, it **MUST** be postmarked **NO LATER** than the seventh calendar day after which you submitted your acceptance form.

Onondaga County Personnel Department

Duane Owens, Commissioner

John H. Mulroy Civic Center

421 Montgomery Street, 13th Floor

Syracuse, New York 13202-2959

Q: How will I have my forms notarized during the current COVID-19 Pandemic while following social distancing protocols, orders and restrictions on meetings, gatherings, etc.?

A: The New York State, Department of State has issued guidance to Notaries Public on how to remotely notarize a document. That guidance can be found by visiting:
https://www.dos.ny.gov/licensing/notary/DOS_COVID19_RemoteNotaryGuidance.pdf

You should contact a Notary Public as soon as possible to discuss these procedures and schedule a remote appointment. *Financial or banking institutions such as banks and credit unions may offer Notary services for a small fee or free.

Q: What if I retired between February 10, 2020 and when I actually received the “VRIP Waiver, Release and Resignation” letter?

A: You may still participate in the VRIP and receive all of the incentives and benefits, provided that you return the signed and notarized letter **NO LATER** than **May 29, 2020**.

Q: Will I be automatically enrolled into the retiree health benefits plan?

A: No. You **MUST** enroll in Retiree Health Benefits by completing a “*Health Enrollment Application*” at the time of retirement and by submitting it to the “*Employee Benefits Division*” on the 15th floor of the Civic Center **NO LATER** than **5:00pm on the day before your retirement date**. If you mail your form via USPS Mail, it **MUST** be postmarked **NO LATER** than **the day before your retirement date**. You may also attach your “*Health Enrollment Application*” to your “*VRIP Waiver, Release and Resignation*” letter when accepting the VRIP. Personnel will forward to the Employee benefits Division. You can find applications available for printing by visiting:
<http://www.ongov.net/ebenefits/documents/enrollmentapp.pdf>

Mail: Onondaga County Division of Employee Benefits

John H. Mulroy Civic Center
421 Montgomery Street, 15th Floor
Syracuse, New York 13202-2959

FAX: (315) 435-2869

EMAIL (scan and attach) to: employeebenefits@ongov.net

Special Notice for all Medicare Eligible Retirees/Medicare Eligible Dependents:

Retiree/dependents are required by statute to enroll in Medicare when they are first eligible to participate in County/State sponsored retiree health coverage. Initial Medicare eligibility is generally at age 65. If you or any of your dependents are eligible for Medicare, either due to age (65) or disability (under 65 but collecting SSD), please contact the Division of Employee Benefits by calling: **315-435-3498** as soon as possible for assistance with Medicare Enrollment, as enrollment in Basic Medicare is completed with the Social Security Administration.

For more information on Onondaga County Retiree Health Benefits, please visit: <http://www.ongov.net/ebenefits/retiree.html>. You may also contact the Division of Employee Benefits by email at: employeebenefits@ongov.net, or by calling: **315-435-3498**.

Q: Can I add a spouse/dependent after I retire?

A: Yes. You may add a spouse and/or dependent to an existing Family Plan or change from an individual to a Family Plan during open enrollment or as the result of a Qualifying event. For a list of “Qualifying Events” please contact the Division of Employee Benefits. See previous question for contact info.

Q: Do I have to collect or “take” my pension when I retire in order to receive the incentive benefits?

A: No. There is no requirement as part of the incentive, that you must collect or “take” your pension when you separate from the County. You are **strongly encouraged** to speak with a New York State & Local Retirement System (NYSLRS) counselor and/or a qualified financial advisor when making decisions about your pension.

Q: Can I come back to work for Onondaga County after I retire?

A: By agreeing to accept the incentive and signing the form provided, you are prohibited from regular employment with the County in either a full-time or part-time capacity. However, your department, **at its sole discretion and with no obligation to do so**, may hire you after you retire on a temporary basis for a limited period of time.

Q: Will I be a CSEA Member if I retire from the County?

A: No. BUT you do have the option to join the CSEA Retirees Local! It has a small annual fee of which your first year as a Retiree Member is covered by your Onondaga County Employees Local 834. For information about membership and benefits, please contact the Local 834 offices for details and an application. The phone number is: [315-446-0330](tel:315-446-0330). You may also email us at: csealocal834@gmail.com.

Q: If I retire from the County under this incentive, can I work for another government employer after retirement?

A: Yes. The prohibition of returning to regular employment only applies to County service. (Please contact the New York State & Local Retirement System for any impact this may have on your pension). You may also work for a private employer after retirement from the County.

Q: If I go to work for another government employer will I be a CSEA Member?

A: CSEA is the largest Public-Sector Union in New York State. There is a good chance that if you go to work for a Village, Town, City, County, School District, Authority etc. in New York State, CSEA will be there. By virtue of New York State's Taylor law, you, or any new employee for that matter, should be afforded an opportunity to meet with the Union representative, if any, for a reasonable amount of time during your first 30-days of employment. You then need to complete a membership application, sign and return to your representative. It's as easy as that!

Q: I previously retired from the County and came back to work here. Am I eligible for the incentive?

A: No. Those who have previously retired are not eligible for the incentive except for those who retired on or after February 10, 2020. **HOWEVER**, employees who left County service at some point during their careers (resigned, terminated, etc.), but **DID NOT RETIRE**, and later returned to County service may participate in the VRIP provided their County service totals at least 5 years.

Q: I am currently on a leave of absence from the County, but I meet the eligibility criteria of the incentive. Can I retire and receive the incentive benefits?

A: You may be eligible to receive the incentive depending on your circumstances. Please contact the Onondaga County Personnel Department, Division of Employee Relations to discuss your present leave of absence and eligibility status. Contact information is located in previous questions above.

Q: Can the \$5,000 sum be deposited in an IRA or Deferred Comp account?

A: You will receive the \$5,000 incentive (less applicable deductions) via a paper check and not through direct deposit, so the County will not be able to deposit it into an account for you. Should you wish to put the money into such an account, you are advised to speak with an account representative or a qualified financial planner to check the deposit rules for these types of investments.

****Every effort has been made to provide accurate information in this document. The County of Onondaga has provided most of the information provided herein. CSEA reserves the right to update this FAQ sheet and redistribute as necessary.****