

Documenting a disability



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Disability retirement is not something one desires or plans for. It becomes a necessity and a much-needed benefit for those forced to consider disability retirement. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is the government agency that administers the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) and Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) disability retirements. When applying for disability retirement, OPM places the responsibility to provide the necessary documentation on the applicant. Understanding what is required and providing the documentation out of the gate will help avoid processing

delays. To read more about the basics of a disability retirement, see the May 2022 Retirement column.

The form used to apply for disability retirement under CSRS and FERS is Standard Form 3112, Documentation in Support of Disability Retirement Application and can be obtained by calling the Human Resource Shared Service Center (HRSSC) at 877-477-3273 (TTY 866-260-7507). This article will address some, but not all, of the documentation necessary. All applicants should be sure to read all instructions on the form very carefully.

One of the first considerations when applying for disability retirement is whether there is a deficiency in service, and what that means according to OPM. In simple terms, the medical condition(s) are incompatible with useful service as a letter carrier. This is typically demonstrated by examining one's medically restricted activities that hinder or limit the delivery of mail and packages (i.e., the essential functions of the job). The evidence must clearly connect the medical condition to the restrictions and be consistent with generally accepted medical practice such that other physicians would likely impose the same restrictions.

Absence from work due to a medical condition can demonstrate a deficiency in service, but on its own would not be sufficient. The Postal Service would need to state how the absence(s) affect the accomplishment of its mission. Given the Postal Service's daily mission to the American public along with chronic understaffing, any absences are likely to support such a deficiency.

After a deficiency is found and documented, the next step is to document that the deficiency is due to a medical condi-

tion. This could be either a disease or injury, including a psychiatric condition. Keep in mind that the medical conditions can be on the job, off the job, or any combination. In the eyes of a FERS or CSRS disability, it simply doesn't matter.

On the portion of the form titled "Physician's Statement" are instructions that may at first glance appear mundane but are vital nonetheless. The physician's statement must be provided on the doctor's letterhead stationery. With each question, the physician should number each item appropriately, and anything that is not applicable to the applicant should be specifically stated as not applicable. Any reference the physician makes to another report or diagnostic should be included as an attachment. Like any medical report, it should be signed by the physician. When the medical report is completed, it and any attachments should be placed into a sealed envelope and marked "Medical Disability—Privileged—Private."

The physician is to provide a comprehensive report of the history and current condition. This includes past and current physical findings, and results of any diagnostics. Therapies and any other procedures to ameliorate the condition should be included. The report must include specific information to show why the applicant is not able to perform their duties.

The diagnosis of the applicant's condition(s) must be included. Although it is not a requirement, OPM prefers that each diagnosis also be provided with the corresponding International Classification of Disease (ICD) code.

The physician must assess the longevity of the condition. Is the condition static, worsening or improving? How long is the condition expected to last? The assessment should include the expected date of a full or partial recovery. To qualify, the condition must be expected to last for at least a year.

The last component of the physician's report is to detail any restrictions. The restrictions should be stated, along with why they have been provided, and how long they are expected to be in effect.

If a condition can be treated that would potentially return the employee to useful and efficient service, but that non-invasive treatment is refused, OPM may deny the application unless the applicant has religious beliefs pertaining to such treatment.

Applying for disability retirement while injured or diseased can be a difficult process in a difficult time. Understanding what is expected from the application and providing everything from the get-go puts you in the best position possible.