



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF WAR
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUN 30 2026

**MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOW FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS**

SUBJECT: Updated Department of War Guidance on Return to In-Person Work Exemptions

- References: (a) Secretary of War Memorandum, "Delegation of Authority to Approve Exemptions to Return to In-Person Work Policy," June 1, 2026
(b) Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Initial Department of Defense Implementation Guidance, Return to In-Person Work," January 31, 2025
(c) Official Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, "Clarification on Return to In-Person Work Exemption for Military Spouses," March 4, 2025

On June 1, 2026, the Secretary of War delegated the approval of certain Return to In-Person Work (RTIPW) exemptions to the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness (USW(P&R)) (reference (a)). Reference (b) limited RTIPW exemptions to employees with an approved deferred resignation request, employees for whom telework or remote work is an approved reasonable accommodation pursuant to applicable law, employees who are military spouses (further clarified by reference (c)), employees for whom the DoW Component head has determined there is no suitable office space at the Agency worksite, and employees for whom applicable law or collective bargaining obligations require an exemption.

Reference (a) delegates authority to me to approve temporary exemptions, not to exceed 1-year, for employees serving in mission critical positions, such that a sudden vacancy would jeopardize strategic goals and mission success, employees serving in hard-to-fill positions requiring rare or highly specialized skills, and employees with exceptional circumstances involving temporary personal hardship. The guidance for consideration of these additional exemptions is attached.

Pending requests for exemption will be returned without action so that DoW Components may reevaluate them against the attached criteria and, as appropriate, resubmit them to me or the Secretary (if exemption is to exceed 1 year) for approval pursuant to reference (a).

An employee's request for an exemption may be denied by the employing DoW Component. DoW Components may request approval of an exemption, subject to the following:

- Exemption requests concerning employees of a Military Department must be endorsed by the Secretary of the Military Department concerned.

- Exemption requests concerning employees of the Office of the Secretary of War must be endorsed by the Principal Staff Assistant with authority, direction, and control over the office to which the employee is assigned.
- Exemption requests concerning employees of a Defense Agency or DoW Field Activity (DAFA) must be endorsed by the Principal Staff Assistant with authority, direction, and control over the Director of the employing DAFA.
- Exemption requests concerning employees of the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff must be endorsed by the Chairman.

DoW Components may submit exemption requests to the Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service (DCPAS) at dodhra.mc_alex.dcpas.mbx.saco@mail.mil. DCPAS will coordinate exemption requests through the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Civilian Personnel Policy.

My point of contact is Mr. Michael A. Cogar, Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Civilian Personnel Policy, at michael.a.cogar3.civ@mail.mil.



Anthony J. Tata

Attachment:
As stated

Return to In-Person Work Exemption Criteria

The criteria below support consistent adjudication of pending and future Return to In-Person Work (RTIPW) exemption requests. These additional criteria supplement the exemptions provided for in reference (a). Three standardized evaluation criteria, as outlined below, will be considered when determining whether to exempt employees from RTIPW. To be considered for exemption under the criteria, the employee must be eligible for telework or remote work consistent with Department of Defense Instruction 1035.01, “Telework and Remote Work,” January 8, 2024, and the approving authority will consider the employees’ performance and conduct in making eligibility determinations. The additional categories for exemption are:

1. **Mission Critical Positions:** The position is vital to the Department/Component’s core functions, such that the employee’s absence would jeopardize strategic goals and mission success. Remote work/telework approved under this exemption will not exceed 1 year. If after 1-year, the Component can demonstrate that recruitment efforts to replace the employee were unsuccessful, the Component may submit a new request for RTIPW exemption under this category for approval. Written justification with relevant documentation must be submitted to the Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service (DCPAS) at dodhra.mc-alex.dcpas.mbx.saco@mail.mil, which will further coordinate with the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Civilian Personnel Policy (ODASW(CPP)).

Criteria: The position must *directly* impact national security mission outcome and must *directly* impact a Secretary of War or Presidential initiative. DoW Component justification and documentation must show that there would be *grave* harm to mission success if the position suddenly became vacant.

Example: The employee occupies a mission-critical cyber role as a software developer for efforts related to Golden Dome. The employee conducts systems testing, analyzes Agency’s requirements, and prepares strategic reports. Due to the complex and time-critical nature of operations, the loss of this position will jeopardize the Agency’s day-to-day mission and impact the delivery of a priority effort.

2. **Retention of Critical Skills/Hard-to-Fill Positions:** The position requires rare or highly specialized skills where recruitment is difficult and/or attrition is well above average. Remote work/telework approved under this exemption will not exceed 1 year. If after 1 year, the Component can demonstrate that recruitment efforts to replace the employee were unsuccessful, the Component may submit a new request for RTIPW exemption under this category for Secretary of War approval. Written justification with relevant documentation must be submitted to DCPAS at dodhra.mc-alex.dcpas.mbx.saco@mail.mil, which will further coordinate with ODASW(CPP).

Criteria: Component or job category risks falling below 75 percent manning. Average time to hire (from the creation of the Request for Personnel Action to the employee’s Entrance on Duty) for the position exceeds 130 calendar days due to

declinations, limited applicant supply, etc. Demonstrated inability to leverage expertise from elsewhere in the Department.

Example: Computer Scientist serves as a technical lead and developer for artificial intelligence software systems supporting the modernization of Navy logistics and personnel systems. The role is focused on algorithm development, large-scale data processing, and systems optimization in support of force readiness. The position requires advanced education in computer science, data science, or artificial intelligence, and historically experiences recruitment challenges in attracting artificial intelligence talent due to private sector competition. The Agency only has one other qualified Computer Scientist and demonstrated recruitment and retention challenges will result in significant mission risk.

3. **Temporary Personal Hardship (Exceptional Circumstances):** Temporary personal hardship situations (not including requests related to the employee's health, which would be addressed through a reasonable accommodation) may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Remote work/telework approved under this exemption will not exceed 6 months. If after 6 months, the employee and Component can demonstrate that the personal hardship persists, the Component may submit a new request for RTIPW exemption under this category for approval. Written justification with relevant documentation must be submitted to DCPAS at dodhra.mc-alex.dcpas.mbx.saco@mail.mil, which will further coordinate with ODASW(CPP).

Criteria: Case-by-case based on the employee's justification and circumstances.

Example: Employee requests to temporarily work remotely from New York City to enable the employee to accompany his child who is receiving inpatient care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.