

OCERS Board Policy Overpaid and Underpaid Plan Benefits Policy

Purpose and Background

1. The purpose of the Orange County Employees Retirement System (“OCERS,” “System,” or “Plan”) *Overpaid and Underpaid Plan Benefits Policy* (“policy”) is to provide a framework that the System can use as a basis for resolving erroneous payments of Plan benefits to members and their beneficiaries. In the event that an overpayment is the result of a felony conviction OCERS Administrative Procedure (OAP) *Felony Forfeitures* shall be used as a basis for resolution. The OCERS Board of Retirement (“Board”) is charged with the responsibility of administering the System in a manner that assures appropriate and prompt delivery of benefits and related services to members and their beneficiaries and of managing the assets in a prudent manner. The Internal Revenue Service requires that operational failures be corrected in a prompt, reasonable, and consistent manner that attempts to place the retirement system in the position it would have been in had the erroneous payment not occurred.

Policy Objectives

2. Members and their beneficiaries (herein referred to as “members”) have a right to accurate pension benefit payments. No member has the right to receive or retain retirement benefit payments that exceed the amounts to which a member is entitled, and no member may be deprived of any benefit payments that he or she is entitled to receive. Subject to all applicable laws and consistent with this policy and the procedures established by the Board, it shall be OCERS’ policy to make every reasonable effort to recover from a member the amount of any overpaid Plan benefits, and remit to a member the amount of any underpaid Plan benefits.

Policy Guidelines

3. After discovery of overpaid or underpaid benefits, and within a reasonable period of time after written notification to the affected member, OCERS will correct the benefit payment amount prospectively and/or pay to the member, or collect from the member, through lump sum or installment payments the amounts to which the member or the Plan is entitled in accordance with this policy and applicable law.
4. These policies and procedures are designed for use when calculation and other errors affect an individual member’s retirement benefits. In the event of a system-wide error that affects multiple members’ benefits, the Board may implement a system-wide correction process that it determines is appropriate under the circumstances.
5. In the event of any inconsistency between applicable law (including IRS rules) and these policies and procedures, the law shall govern.

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Policy Procedures for Overpaid Benefits

6. *Appropriate Interest.* When an overpayment of Plan benefits is discovered more than ninety (90) days after the member/payee's initial benefit payment, OCERS will make a prospective adjustment to the member's benefit and take all reasonable steps to recover the full amount of all overpayments, going back to the inception of the error, and charging "appropriate interest," as defined below, compounded annually during the period in which the benefit overpayments were made and also during any repayment period (*i.e.*, applied to the outstanding amount due until fully repaid).
 - a. In cases where there is evidence that the benefit overpayment resulted from fraud or dishonest conduct by the member/payee or because the member/payee provided, or caused to be provided, inaccurate information to OCERS or the member's employer, then "appropriate interest" shall be determined using the System's actuarially assumed rate of return as of the date OCERS sets for commencing repayment, and charged to the member/payee.
 - b. If the benefit overpayment was solely the result of an error by OCERS and/or the member's employer, then "appropriate interest" shall be equal to the Systems actuarial assumed rate of return as of the date OCERS sets for commencing repayment, and charged to the member's employer as an administrative expense, without amortization.
 - c. Notwithstanding the above, any reduction in the member/payee's ongoing monthly benefit will be limited to a maximum of 15% of the gross monthly benefit. The balance due will be paid over time, subject to this limitation.
7. The Board believes that considerations of cost effectiveness make it prudent and reasonable to pursue recovery of overpaid benefits only where the cumulative total amount of overpaid benefits is \$100 or more. Accordingly, OCERS is authorized to not seek recovery of any such overpaid benefits where the total amount overpaid to the member less than \$100.
8. When recovering benefit overpayments, the following apply:
 - a. *Director of Member Services:* When the total amount of such overpaid benefits, not including interest, is \$10,000 or less, the Director of Member Services shall have authority to agree to extend the time period for the member's installment payments to a period not exceeding the expected lifetime of the member as determined by the actuary.
 - b. CEO:
 - i. Regardless of the amount of the Plan's claim against the member, the CEO shall have the authority to agree to extend the time period for the member's installment payments to a period not exceeding the expected lifetime of the member as determined by the actuary.
 - ii. In addition, when the total amount of the Plan's claim against the member, not including interest, is \$1,000 or less, the CEO, on the advice of legal counsel, shall have the authority to compromise the claim.

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- c. *Board*: Only the Board may compromise claims in which the total amount of such overpaid benefits, not including interest, is greater than \$1,000.
 - d. *Compromising claims*: The amount of the Plan's claim for overpaid benefits is the difference between the amounts actually paid to the member for the recovery period and the amounts that should have been paid, together with "appropriate interest" from the dates of the actual payments to the date(s) the correction is effective. The likelihood of collection, the cost of collection, the amount of possible recovery and extreme hardship to the member will be considered by the CEO and/or the Board when determining whether to compromise a claim. Compromising a claim may include a different method of repayment than is otherwise provided by this Policy and/or forgiveness or partial forgiveness of principal and/or interest.
 - e. *Reporting*: Every year, for cases involving benefit overpayments the Director of Member Services shall provide a report to the Board.
9. The Board adopts the following procedures for accomplishing the recovery of overpaid Plan benefits:
- a. Upon discovery of the benefit overpayment, OCERS will send a letter by certified mail, return receipt requested, or by express delivery service, to the member. Subject to the provisions of this Policy, the letter will provide the following information to the member regarding the overpaid benefits:
 - i. Provide notice of the prospective adjustment to the member's benefit payment (to reflect the correct amount);
 - ii. Request payment to OCERS of the amount of overpaid benefits with appropriate interest; and
 - iii. Unless otherwise determined by the Board, the CEO, or the Director of Member Services (see sections 8.a. and 8.b., above) or, if a repayment plan for a longer period is needed due to the limitation described section 6.b.ii., above, the letter will set a repayment plan with two options:
 - *Option 1* – equal installments deducted from the member's monthly benefit over the same length of time that the overpaid benefits occurred, with "appropriate interest" (as that phrase is defined in section 6 above) applied during the overpayment period and during the repayment period; and
 - *Option 2* – lump sum payment to the Plan for the full amount overpaid, with "appropriate interest" (as that phrase is defined in section 6 above) applied during the overpayment period.
 - b. OCERS may pursue all legal remedies to collect such overpaid Plan benefits, including making a claim on an estate or trust. In addition, if the member dies before the full amount of principal and interest is paid, OCERS may recover the remaining principal and interest from any lump sum amount OCERS is obligated to pay to the member's estate or named beneficiaries of the member; provided, however, OCERS shall not seek to recover any such remaining amounts

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from any continuation payments made to a surviving spouse or an optional beneficiary of the member, unless an erroneous payment is made to the surviving spouse or optional beneficiary.

- c. OCERS will maintain a permanent record of all amounts of such overpaid Plan benefits and the repayment to OCERS of those overpaid benefits.

Policy Procedures for Underpaid Benefits

10. When the Plan has underpaid benefits to the member, and the underpayment is discovered more than 90 days after the member/payee's initial benefit payment, the member shall be entitled to a prospective adjustment to his or her retirement benefits necessary to correct the error, as well as a lump sum payment for all past amounts owed as a result of the error, with interest compounded annually at the rate of 3%. Interest shall accrue on the amounts owed from the date of each underpaid benefit to the date of the lump sum corrective payment. The payment shall be made within forty-five (45) days of discovery and receipt of all information needed to correct the account.
11. If a member who was underpaid benefits has died prior to payment of the lump sum amount due, the payment will be made according to OCERS' standard procedures for paying residual amounts following the death of the member (*e.g.*, to the designated beneficiary, estate, personal representative, trustee of the member trust, etc.).
 - a. If, after following its standard procedures, Plan staff has not been able locate a person entitled to payment, the Plan shall hold the funds on behalf of that person for five years. If the funds are not claimed within five years, the funds may be transferred into the System's pension reserve fund. If someone later appears to claim the funds, the Board or the CEO will consider such claims on a case-by-case basis.
 - b. The Plan will maintain a permanent record of all amounts of outstanding refunds of underpaid benefits and any amounts that have been transferred into the pension reserve fund.
12. If the total amount that the Plan owes to the member is \$75 or less, the Plan is not required to make the corrective distribution if the reasonable direct costs of processing and delivering the distribution to the member would exceed the amount of the distribution.

Member Appeal Rights

13. A member shall have the right to appeal any decision regarding corrective actions that the plan takes with respect to recovering and/or returning over and underpayments of Plan benefits.
14. The appeal process will generally follow the same pattern as benefit appeals.
 - a. The member will first appeal a staff decision regarding an erroneous payment to the Director of Member Services. The Director of Member Services shall respond to the member in writing.
 - b. If the member does not agree with the decision of the Director of Member Services, the member may appeal that decision, in writing and within forty-five (45) days of mailing of the decision by the Director of Member Services, to the CEO. The CEO shall respond to the member in writing.

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- c. If the member does not agree with the decision of the CEO, the member may appeal the matter, in writing and within forty-five (45) days of mailing of the decision by the CEO, to the Board.
- d. The Board will hear the matter at a regularly scheduled meeting giving reasonable notice to the member so the member may appear at the meeting. Staff will provide background information and documentation to the Board to assist it in making its decision. After due consideration, the Board shall vote on the matter and instruct Member Services staff to notify the member in writing of the Board's determination.
- e. If the member disagrees with the determination of the Board, the member may request, in writing and within forty-five (45) days of the date of mailing of the Board's decision, an administrative hearing of the matter.
- f. The matter will then be scheduled for administrative hearing pursuant to OCERS' Board of Retirement Policy for Administrative Hearings.
- g. The findings and recommendations of the hearing officer shall be reviewed by staff, and staff shall make a recommendation to the Board to take action pursuant to Government Code Section 31534. If the Board adopts the recommendation of the hearing officer, that decision of the Board shall be final, and Member Services staff will inform the member of the Board's decision in writing with a proof of service attached. Notice to the member of the Board's final decision shall signify exhaustion of the member's administrative remedies.
- h. This process may be adjusted in cases where the initial determination is made by the CEO.
- i. Offsets and other collection efforts will be stayed during the pendency of the above-outlined appeals process; provided, however, that the Board shall have the discretion to suspend implementing its recovery from the member in whole or in part during any ensuing court action. Interest will continue to accrue on all amounts owed to OCERS during the appeals process and litigation.

Policy Review

- 15. The Board will review this policy at least every three (3) years to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate.

Policy History


- 16. This policy was adopted by the Board of Retirement on May 16, 2016 and amended on October 21, 2019.



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Secretary's Certificate

I, the undersigned, the duly appointed Secretary of the Orange County Employees Retirement System, hereby certify the adoption of this policy.



Steve Delaney
Secretary of the Board

10/21/19

Date