

CHALLENGER

Wisconsin Ω Ohio Ω Michigan Ω Minnesota Ω Indiana Ω Illinois

October 2025

AFGE Local 1395



Understanding the MOU On Government Shutdowns

Gregory Brown | October 2025

Government shutdowns bring stress, confusion, and real worry for federal employees. Nobody plans for them, but when they happen, workers deserve clarity and protection. To help make sure SSA employees know their rights, AFGE and SSA negotiated a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**.

While AFGE does not support furloughs, this agreement lays out important protections and responsibilities if a shutdown occurs. It's designed to give employees clear information and ensure their rights remain safeguarded.

Key Protections

Decisions to begin a shutdown come from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and furlough procedures follow guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

The MOU makes one thing clear: **employees' statutory, regulatory, and contractual rights remain intact.** Certain contract provisions may be suspended under the Anti-Deficiency Act, but many continue to apply. If conflicts arise, AFGE and SSA agree to work together to resolve them.

And it's important to remember: employees cannot "volunteer" to work during a furlough unless specifically allowed by law.

Staying Informed During a Shutdown

SSA is required to give employees reliable ways to get information. That includes:

- A toll-free number and a dedicated website available 24/7
- Mass notifications with updates and return-to-duty instructions
- Online postings of required notices and sample furlough letters

Employees are expected to monitor these sources and keep their contact information current. Supervisors may also reach out directly when needed.

Pay, Benefits, and Leave

If funds run out, pay deductions will follow OPM's

"Shutdowns disrupt lives, but your rights, your pay, and your voice remain protected, because AFGE is at the table, defending you even in the toughest time."

order of precedence. However, SSA will continue contributing to employees' health insurance and will adjust tax withholdings as necessary.

Once a shutdown ends, SSA will brief AFGE on retroactive pay and benefits for everyone who was furloughed.

Other key provisions include:

- **Leave Requests:** Preapproved leave and requests after the shutdown must be respected.
- **Excepted Employees:** Those required to work

(continued on Page 3)



The Challenger

October 2025

The Challenger is the official membership publication
of:

AFGE Local 1395

P.O. Box 804730

Chicago, IL 60680-4108

Call/Text: 833-575-1395 (press "0" to leave a message)

Secured Fax: 833-575-1395

Email: afge1395@afge1395.org

Local 1395 website: www.afge1395.org

AFGE website: www.afge.org

Facebook: AFGE Local 1395 (*members ONLY*)

Monthly **ZOOM** Membership Meetings:

2nd Wednesday –6pm (*Monthly*)

Email for Link

Editorial: From Shutdowns to PACS: A Unified Voice for Fairness

Dear Members,

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter. This space belongs to all of us, and it should reflect the voices, concerns, and ideas of every member. That's why your input matters now more than ever.

We are living through challenging times. The ongoing **government shutdown** has created uncertainty for federal employees across the country, and our members at SSA are carrying that burden firsthand. On top of that, issues with **PACS performance ratings** continue to raise questions about fairness and accountability. And as many of you know, matters surrounding **leave policies** — from unanticipated leave to preapproved requests after a shutdown — are impacting families in real and personal ways.

Our union is not ignoring these struggles. We are addressing them directly, whether through MOUs to protect your rights during shutdowns, training to help you navigate PACS evaluations, or ongoing advocacy around leave so that no member feels punished for life circumstances outside their control.

This newsletter is more than just updates. It is a way to stay connected and to remind each other that none of us stand alone. By sharing news, experiences, and ideas, we can learn from one another, lift each other up, and continue building a union that works for everyone.

Let's keep the conversations going. Let's make sure our voices are heard, our rights protected, and our solidarity unshakable. Whether it's standing up during a shutdown, pushing back on unfair PACS practices, or defending leave rights, our fight is stronger when we stand together.

Thank you for your continued support and involvement.

In solidarity,
Challenger Staff.

AI-Powered Content Creation Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in the creation of specific content. AI has been instrumental in assisting us to generate, refine, and tailor content to meet the needs and preferences of our audience. By harnessing the capabilities of AI, we aim to enhance efficiency, creativity, and relevance in our content creation process while maintaining a commitment to quality and authenticity.

Understanding the MOU On Government Shutdowns

may telework if portable work is available. They can earn credit hours, but cannot use them until the shutdown ends.

- **Union Officials:** Limited official time may be granted for union work, depending on system access and management approval. Requests must be processed quickly. Excepted union reps may request intermittent furloughs to perform union duties.
- **Court Leave:** Excepted employees absent due to court leave will be placed on intermittent furlough.

Employee Rights and Access

During a furlough, employees may return to their worksite to collect personal belongings.

Union representatives will be notified of shutdown-related formal discussions and may attend. Union officials also retain access to union-provided office space.

SSA will share a list of excepted positions with AFGE as soon as possible. When fewer workers are needed, selection will be based on the earliest Service Computation Date.

Employees can also request outside employment during a shutdown, and SSA has agreed to respond quickly.

Retirement, Deadlines, and Arbitration

Shutdowns will not affect retirement eligibility or effective retirement dates as long as requirements are otherwise met.

Filing deadlines under the National Agreement are extended by the length of the shutdown. Arbitration hearings that fall during the shutdown may be postponed if both parties agree.

Final Notes

Shutdowns disrupt lives, but this MOU shows AFGE's commitment to protecting members under the toughest conditions. The agreement keeps rights intact, ensures communication, and guarantees that pay and benefits are restored once funding resumes.

Every year, AFGE also provides input on SSA's contingency plan so members' concerns are heard in advance.

The bottom line: **your union is at the table, defending you, even during a shutdown.**

Your Shutdown Rights at a Glance

1. Your Rights Stay Intact

- AFGE does not agree with furloughs, but your legal and contractual rights remain protected.
- Some provisions may be suspended under the Anti-Deficiency Act, but many still apply.

2. Staying Informed

- SSA Toll-free number and website available 24/7.
- Mass notifications with updates and return-to-duty instructions.
- Sample furlough letters posted online.

3. Pay & Benefits

- Health insurance contributions continue.
- Tax withholdings adjusted as needed.
- Retroactive pay and benefits provided once the shutdown ends.

4. Leave & Work Rules

- Preapproved leave requests are honored.
- Excepted employees may telework if work is portable.
- Credit hours can be earned but not used until after the shutdown (*NO CARRY OVER CREDIT HOURS ALLOWED*).

5. Access & Representation

- You can collect personal items from your workplace.
- Union reps are notified of formal discussions and may attend.
- Union officials retain access to union-provided office space.

6. Other Protections

- Shutdowns do not affect retirement eligibility or effective dates.
- Filing deadlines extended by the length of the shutdown.
- Arbitration dates may be postponed by agreement.

AFGE Local 1395 Certified Election Results 2025

Certified by Honest Ballot, Inc.

Vice-President for FO (3)

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| PATRICIA WASHINGTON-SHEHI** | 70 VOTES |
| PATRICIA HAYES** | 67 VOTES |
| KOURTNEY CRAIGMILES** | 65 VOTES |
| EUNICA PERSON | 35 VOTES |

Council Delegates for FO (3)

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| PATRICIA WASHINGTON-SHEHI** | 60 VOTES |
| PATRICIA HAYES** | 49 VOTES |
| JILL HORNICK** | 48 VOTES |
| CASSANDRA GREEN | 47 VOTES |
| KOURTNEY CRAIGMILES | 39 VOTES |

Delegates and Alternates to the National & 7th District Caucus (2)

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| PATRICIA WASHINGTON-SHEHI** | 34 VOTES |
| YOLANDA THOMAS** | 26 VOTES |
| PATRICIA HAYES** | 26 VOTES |
| HOLLY JUSTINE JAMES | 25 VOTES |
| BARBARA FAIRALL | 24 VOTES |
| CASSANDRA GREEN | 23 VOTES |
| SANDRA BETTIS | 16 VOTES |

Council Delegates for ODAR (3)

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| GREG SENDEN** | 73 VOTES |
| YOLANDA THOMAS** | 71 VOTES |
| BARBARA FAIRFALL** | 58 VOTES |
| PATRICIA HAYES | 38 VOTES |

Administrative Director for PSC (1)

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| HOLLY JUSTINE JAMES** | 43 VOTES |
| GREGORY BROWN | 42 VOTES |

Certification Summary

Honest Ballot supervised the AFGE Local 1395 elections for 2025. The election was conducted in accordance with AFGE Local 1395 bylaws and Department of Labor standards. Honest Ballot certifies that the election was fair and accurate, and that the results reflect the ballots cast by members.

- Nomination notices mailed: January 23, 2025
- In-person nominations: February 12, 2025
- Acceptance forms received until: February 20, 2025
- Ballots mailed: March 12, 2025
- Ballots tabulated: May 5, 2025
- Total nomination notices mailed: 1,261
- Total ballots mailed: 1,261

| Local 1395 OFFICER POSITIONS | ELECTED BY ACCLIMATION |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| President (1) | CHERYL BELLAMY BONNER |
| Executive Vice-President (1) | Monica Harris |
| Vice-President at Large (3) | ANGELA BARNHART |
| Vice-President for OQP (3) | NO CANDIDATES |
| Vice-President for PSC (3) | JEROME JONES |
| Vice-President for ODAR (3) | BARBARA FAIRALL YOLONDA THOMAS |
| Administrative Director for FO (1) | JILL HORNICK |
| Administrative Director for OQP(1) | EARL TUCKER |
| Administrative Director for ODAR (1) | GREG SENDEN |
| Treasurer (1) | DEBORAH FLYNN |
| Financial Secretary (1) | MONWELLA FOSTER |
| Office Manager (1) | NO CANDIDATES |
| Recording Secretary (1) | NO CANDIDATES |
| Correspondence Secretary (1) | NO CANDIDATES |
| Sergeant-at-Arms (1) | NO CANDIDATES |
| Executive Board Member for FO (2) | CASSANDRA GREEN ERIC TAYLOR |
| Executive Board Member for OQP (2) | NO CANDIDATES |
| Executive Board Member for ODAR (2) | LATONYA BERRY PATRICIA STARR |
| Executive Board Member for PSC (2) | CATHERINE MULLIGAN |
| Council Delegate for OQP (1) | EARL TUCKER |
| Council Delegate for PSC (1) | HOLLY JUSTINE JAMES |

PACS at SSA: What It Is, How It Works, And Why It Matters

Making sense of Article 21 and how your performance is really measured



Gregory Brown | August 2025

Every office has the same debates. Some people feel invisible, others swear they're carrying the whole building, and supervisors often end up stuck in the middle. At SSA, those debates aren't supposed to be about favoritism or guesswork. They're supposed to come down to one thing: PACS.

That stands for the **Performance Assessment and Communications System**. Article 21 of the SSA AFGE National Agreement spells it out. And like it or not, PACS shapes your career — from ratings and awards to promotions and even discipline.

Why PACS Exists

Before PACS, evaluations could depend a little too much on the personality of your supervisor. One might be generous, another impossibly strict, and nobody knew what “fair” really meant. PACS was created to bring consistency.

Here's what it includes:

- **Performance Plan:** Your roadmap for the year.
- **Critical Elements:** The parts of your job you cannot afford to miss.
- **Performance Standards:** The line between “fully successful” and falling short.
- **Rating of Record:** The number (1 to 5) that follows you, influencing awards, promotions, and training.

As one veteran claims specialist put it: *“Before PACS, you never knew what mattered. Now at least it's on paper. You might not like the standard, but you can see it.”*

Don't Ignore Your Plan

Every appraisal period starts with a performance plan. Your supervisor should

“In PACS, it's not about what you say you deserve, it's about what you can prove you achieved.”

deliver it within 30 days. Too often, employees sign it and never look at it again.

That's like taking a test without reading the study guide.

One AFGE steward said it best: *“If you don't know your plan, you don't know the test you're taking.”*

Your plan is the foundation of your rating.

Treat it like it matters — because it does.

Progress Reviews: The Mid-Year Reality Check

Article 21 requires at least one progress review per year. Think of it as your mid-game checkpoint.

But here's the catch: some employees treat reviews like small talk. "My supervisor says I'm fine, so I must be fine." That's risky.

Reviews are your opportunity to make adjustments before it's too late. If errors are piling up, this is when you fix them. If you're excelling, this is the moment to make sure it's documented.

One employee admitted: "I thought I was cruising at Outstanding. Then my error rate came up. That meeting stung, but it saved me from a bad surprise at the end."

Ratings That Stick

At the end of the cycle, your supervisor enters your **rating of record** into PACS. That number isn't about how busy you feel or how many years you've been in the office. It's about how your work stacked up against the standards in your plan.

Ratings range from 1 (*Unacceptable*) to 5 (*Outstanding*). And they matter. They affect awards, training opportunities, promotions, and more.

As one AFGE steward told a group of new hires: "That number follows you. If you want opportunities down the line, you can't just say you're a 5. You've got to

show it."

Busting the Myths

Let's clear up a few common PACS myths:

- "My supervisor can rate me however they feel." Wrong. Ratings must tie to your standards.
- "Doing more work automatically makes me Outstanding." Not true. Accuracy and timeliness matter just as much as quantity.

• "Awards equal Level 5." Nope. Awards are tied to ratings, but not everyone who gets an award is an Outstanding overall. As one steward said: "The system isn't perfect, but it's predictable. Know your plan, track your work, and you've got leverage."

The Bottom Line

PACS may look like dry contract language, but it's a system that can protect you and help you shine. It's about proof, not pride.

- Study your plan.
- Treat your progress review as a checkpoint, not a formality.

Keep your own records so you can back yourself up. Because at the end of the day, PACS isn't about what you say you deserve — it's about what you can show you achieved. And when you understand how it works,

Top 3 PACS Tips

1. **Know Your Plan** — Don't just sign it. Study it.
2. **Take Reviews Seriously** — They're your mid-year chance to adjust course.
3. **Keep Your Own Records** — Bring evidence to the table; don't rely on memory.

PACS Myths vs. Facts

Myth: "My supervisor can rate me however they feel."

Fact: Ratings must tie directly to your written performance plan and standards.

Myth: "If I do more work than everyone else, I must be Outstanding."

Fact: Accuracy and timeliness count as much as volume. Quantity alone doesn't equal Level 5.

Myth: "Getting an award means I'm a Level 5."

Fact: Awards are linked to ratings, but not everyone with an award is rated Outstanding.

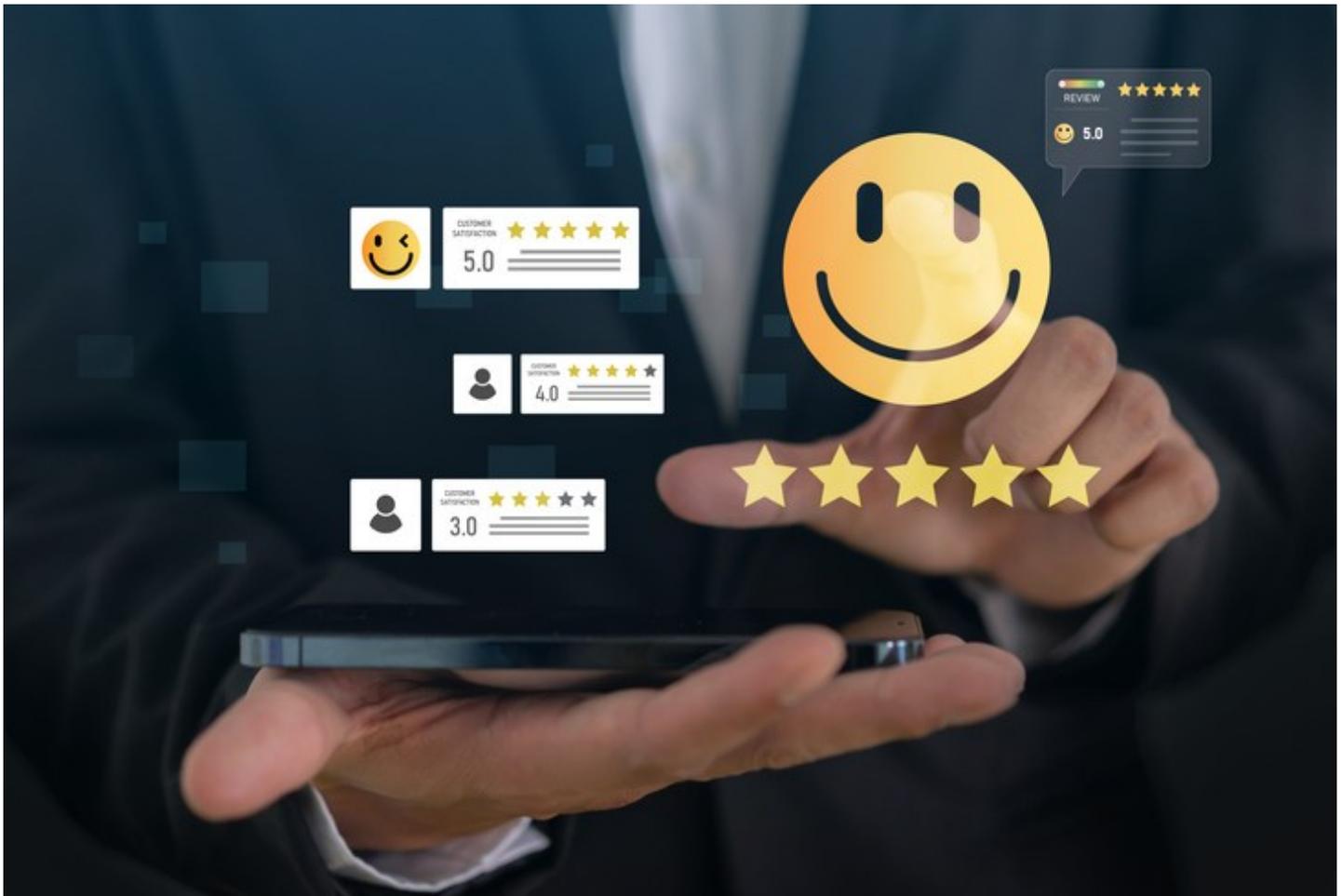
Myth: "Progress reviews are just formalities."

Fact: Reviews are documented checkpoints that can make or break your final rating.



So You Think You're A Level 5 Employee?

At SSA, only performance-not pride-earns the top rating under PACS



Gregory Brown | September 2025

Every office has its legends—the coworkers who swear they're the glue holding everything together. At SSA, some of them will even tell you: *"I'm a Level 5 employee!"*

But here's the truth: Article 21 of the SSA AFGE National Agreement, which governs the Performance Assessment and Communications System (PACS), has the final say. And PACS doesn't hand out Level 5s just because someone *feels* indispensable. It's not about years in the chair or how busy you look. Level 5 is a rating you earn with documented performance.

One longtime employee once said in

the breakroom, *"I've been here twenty years. If that's not Level 5, I don't*

"When you understand PACS, you don't just protect yourself — you give yourself the chance to shine."

know what is." The reality? Longevity alone doesn't equal *Outstanding*. PACS is about proof, not pride.

What Article 21 Actually Does

Article 21 lays out the rules of the game. It defines how your work is measured, reviewed, and rated. Those ratings drive promotions, awards, and sometimes even discipline.

The system works like this:

- At the start of the year, performance plans spell out what's expected.
- Certain "critical elements" carry more weight—miss those and your whole rating can drop.
- Standards define what's considered successful and what it takes to go beyond.



Ratings run from 1 (*Unacceptable*) to 5 (*Outstanding*).

As one newer claims rep explained: *"I used to think my manager gave me a number based on whether she liked me. Now I see it's all in writing. Not perfect, but better than guessing."*

The Myth of the Level 5

Plenty of folks think having the heaviest caseload or putting in the most years automatically makes you Outstanding. It doesn't.

Article 21 makes it clear: Level 5 means consistently exceeding "fully successful." One supervisor put it this way: *"A 5 is like an A-plus. It's not showing up. It's not doing the minimum. It's going above—and it has to be proven in your work, not just your stories about your work."*

Volume matters, but only if paired with accuracy, timeliness, and results. In PACS, evidence speaks louder than bravado.

Progress Reviews: Your Reality Check

Here's where self-belief meets the paperwork. Article 21 requires at least one progress review each cycle. These aren't optional pep talks—they're written, documented, and meant to help you see exactly where you stand.

As one employee admitted after a tough review: *"I thought I was cruising at a 5 until my supervisor pulled out my error rate. That was a gut check."*

Reviews should keep surprises off the table. If you're slipping, you'll know. If you're excelling, that'll be in writing too. Think of reviews as checkpoints—opportunities to adjust before the finish line.

Why Ratings Matter

It's tempting to see ratings as just a number. But under PACS, they matter:

- They shape promotions and awards.
- They influence training and development opportunities.

They can impact discipline if performance falls short. As one AFGE steward told new hires: *"That number in PACS follows you. If you want doors to open, you can't just say you're a 5. You've got to show it."*

A Tale of Two Employees

We've all seen versions of this:

- **Employee A** has 20 years on the job and often says, *"This place would fall apart without me."* But her reviews show missed deadlines and incomplete files. Her final rating? Level

3—Fully Successful. She's stunned, but the paperwork is clear.

Employee B has only five years of service. He meets deadlines, takes on extra projects, and earns strong reviews. His record supports a Level 5—Outstanding. As he put it: *"I didn't chase the number. I just focused on doing the job right. The rating came from that."*

The Bottom Line

So—do you think you're a Level 5? Article 21 gives you the answer, and it doesn't come from gut feelings. It comes from your performance plan, your documented reviews, and your actual results.

If you want to be recognized as *Outstanding*, don't just declare it. Prove it. Study your plan. Take your reviews seriously. Show, through your daily work, that you exceed expectations.

Because at the end of the day, PACS isn't a rumor mill. It's a system that rewards proof. And that's what separates those who say they're Level 5 from those who truly are.

Quick Facts About PACS

- ◇ **It's in the contract.** Article 21 of the SSA AFGE National Agreement spells out how PACS works.
- ◇ **It's about evidence.** Ratings must tie back to your performance plan and documented results.
- ◇ **It follows you.** Your PACS rating impacts promotions, awards, training, and even discipline.
- ◇ **It's predictable.** If you know your plan, track your work, and use progress reviews, you can manage your outcome.



Not All Work From Home Is Equal

The Difference Between WAHBE and Reasonable Accommodation



Gregory Brown | September 2025

Working from home sounds simple—log in, get to work. But at SSA, not all work-from-home arrangements are the same. Two policies often get confused: **Work at Home By Exception (WAHBE)** and **Reasonable Accommodation**. Both may involve working outside the office, but the rules, protections, and reasons behind them are very different. Mixing them up can leave you unprotected.

WAHBE: Short-Term Flexibility

WAHBE comes from Article 39 of the SSA AFGE National Agreement. The

key words are “by exception.” WAHBE is designed for **rare, occasional needs**:

- A snowstorm makes travel unsafe.
- A school closure leaves you home with your child.

You need quiet to finish an unusual assignment. WAHBE is **temporary** and **management has full discretion** to approve or deny it. It is a helpful pressure release valve when life throws you a curveball, but it is never guaranteed.

Reasonable Accommodation: A Legal Right

Reasonable Accommodation comes

“WAHBE is a courtesy, whereas Reasonable Accommodations is a right.”

from Article 18, Section 10 and is tied to the **Rehabilitation Act** and the **Americans with Disabilities Act**. This process exists to ensure employees with disabilities can perform their jobs fairly and without discrimination.

Here’s how it works:

- The employee requests the accommodation.
- Management must engage in an interactive process to find solutions.

Options may include adaptive equipment, schedule changes, reassignment, or telework if appropriate.

The big difference? **Reasonable**

Accommodation is not optional. If the request is reasonable and does not cause undue hardship, management must provide it.

Flexibility vs. Obligation

Confusing the two can cause frustration. Some employees assume WAHBE can cover ongoing needs, only to have it denied. Others with medical conditions try to lean on WAHBE when they should be protected under Reasonable Accommodation.

Think of it this way:

- **Purpose:** WAHBE = occasional life events. RA = disability-related needs.
- **Duration:** WAHBE = short term. RA = long term or permanent.

- **Approval:**
 - WAHBE = management discretion.
 - RA = legal obligation.
- **Documentation:**
 - WAHBE = can require documentation.
 - RA = always requires medical proof.

Real-World Examples

- **Employee A** cares for an elderly parent. Emergencies come up a few times a year. She requests WAHBE occasionally, management approves, and it works exactly as intended—a short-term fix.
- **Employee B** has chronic migraines triggered by the office environment. He requests WAHBE week after week. At first management allows it, but later denies it. Frustrated, he feels discriminated against. The real issue? He needed to request a Reasonable Accommodation, which could have given him long-term, legally backed protection.

The Bottom Line

WAHBE and Reasonable

Accommodation both involve working from home, but they are **not interchangeable**.

- WAHBE (Article 39) = short-term flexibility, at management’s discretion.

Union Tips

- ◇ Use **WAHBE** for occasional life curveballs.
- ◇ Use **Reasonable Accommodations** if your medical condition affects your major life functions.
- ◇ Don’t confuse the two—only **Reasonable Accommodation** gives you legal protection.

- Reasonable Accommodation (Article 18) = disability rights, legally protected. If you just need help handling the unexpected, WAHBE may be right. But if a medical condition impacts your major life functions, **don’t rely on WAHBE**—pursue a Reasonable Accommodation.

Knowing the difference means protecting yourself, securing the right support, and making sure the union can help defend your rights.

WAHBE vs. Reasonable Accommodations at a Glance

| Feature | WAHBE | Reasonable Accommodation |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Purpose | Short-term, unusual needs (weather, family, emergency, special project, etc.) | Disability related needs to ensure fair and equal access to work. |
| Duration | Occasional and temporary | Long term or permanent as needed. |
| Approval | At management’s discretion. | Legally required if reasonable. |
| Process | Simple request to supervisor. | Formal request; interactive process required. |
| Documentation | Can require medical documentation. | Always requires medical documentation. |
| Protection | Can be denied. | Backed by federal law (ADA, Rehabilitation Act). |



When Life Happens: Understanding Unanticipated Leave

A guide to protecting yourself and avoiding AWOL under Article 31, Section 5

Gregory Brown | September 2025

Nobody plans for the day their car won't start, their child wakes up sick, or a stomach bug knocks them out. Life doesn't run on a schedule. At SSA, these moments fall under **unanticipated leave**. Article 31 of the SSA AFGE National Agreement spells out how to handle it — and knowing the rules can mean the difference between an excused absence and being charged AWOL.

What Article 31 Does

SSA needs schedules to serve the public, but employees need fairness when emergencies strike. Article 31

bridges that gap by laying out a process for sudden absences, whether it's illness, a family emergency, or something unexpected. It's not the same as requesting annual leave in advance or being excused for jury duty — it's the safety net for the in-between moments.

Step 1: Call In Immediately

The first rule is simple: **don't leave them guessing.**

- Fixed shifts: Call before your shift starts.
- Flexible schedules: Call before the end of your flex-band.
- Training or other assignments:

“The rule isn't never miss work-the rule is never leave them guessing.”

Call before it begins.

- If you can't make the call yourself, someone else can do it. If your supervisor isn't available, voicemail is acceptable.

Failing to notify management may result in AWOL, but you still have a chance to fix it by providing a reasonable explanation or

documentation later.

Step 2: Sick Leave

Most unanticipated absences are for illness. Under Article 31:

- Three days or less: usually no doctor's note needed.
- More than three days: medical certification required.

Chronic conditions: one note every six months may suffice.

Importantly, you don't have to disclose your diagnosis — only that you were unable to work.

Step 3: Out of Leave?

- Emergencies don't check your leave balance. If you run out:
- Request **advanced annual leave** (up to 80 hours, what you can earn in a calendar year).
- Request **advanced sick leave** (up to 30 days for serious illness/injury).
- Request **leave without pay (LWOP)**.

Some LWOP is guaranteed under the **FMLA, military duty, or workers comp claims**.

Step 4: Excused Absences

Sometimes you don't need leave at all. Excused absences include:

- Unsafe workplace conditions (fire alarms, hazards).
- Donating blood or platelets.
- Voting (up to 3 hours).
- Severe weather or office closures (Weather and Safety Leave).

Jury service or required witness duty.

Step 5: AWOL vs Approved Leave

AWOL can sound final, but often it's temporary. If you didn't call in or your absence isn't yet documented, you may be marked AWOL at first. But if you provide proof later, it can be changed to approved leave.

As one AFGE steward explained: "AWOL is like a placeholder. It only sticks if you do nothing about it."

Step 6: Returning to Work

When you come back, provide any required documentation and resume your position. If you were out on LWOP, you're entitled to return to your same job or an equivalent one in your commuting area. This prevents employees from being sidelined after legitimate emergencies.

The Bottom Line

Unanticipated leave isn't about dodging work — it's about recognizing that life doesn't always follow a neat schedule. Article 31 gives you a roadmap: call in fast, document when needed, request advanced leave if you're out of hours, and know when you qualify for excused absence.

By following the process, you protect yourself, avoid unnecessary AWOL, and keep trust with your supervisor. Most importantly, you get to focus on what really matters: your health, your family, and

Unanticipated Leave in 60 seconds

◇ Call in Fast

- * Fixed shift → before your shift starts.
- * Flexible schedule → before the flex-band ends.
- * Training/assignment → before it begins.
If you can't call, someone else can.
Voicemails count.

◇ Sick Leave Rules

- * ≤ 3 days → usually no doctors note needed, but can be requested.
- * 3 days or more → bring medical certification.
- * Chronic conditions → 1 note every 6 months.
You don't have to reveal your diagnosis.

◇ Out of Leave?

- * Ask for advanced annual leave (*up to 80 hrs.*).
- * Ask for advanced sick leave (*up to 30 days*).
- * Request LWOP if needed (*guaranteed in some cases, like FMLA*).

◇ Excused Absences

- * Unsafe conditions (*fire alarms, hazards*).
- * Blood/platelet donation.
- * Voting (*up to 3 hrs.*).
- * Severe weather/office closings.
- * Jury duty or required witness.

◇ AWOL vs Approved Leave

- * AWOL is a placeholder.
- * Provide proof → it can be changed to approved leave.

◇ Returning to Work

- * Submit any required documentation.
- * Return to your position or equivalent (*LWOP protected*).

Let's Build Local 1395 Together

Your union is only as strong as the people in it, and that means we need you.

There are many ways to step up and make a difference:

Be a Steward

Stand with your coworkers, protect their rights, and make sure every voice is heard. Don't worry. We'll provide the training and support you need.

Join the Challenger Newsletter Team

Do you love to write, design, or take photos? Help us tell our stories, celebrate our victories, and highlight what makes this union family strong.

Pitch in at Union Events

From planning to helping out on the day of, your energy keeps our members connected and our union vibrant.

Every skill matters. Every hand helps. Every voice counts.

Together, we can create something inspiring and lasting, a union that reflects all of us.

Ready to get involved? Reach out today. We can't wait to work alongside you.

AFGE Local 1395 — Stronger, Louder, Together.

All inquiries should be sent to the following email address:

afge1395@afge1395.org

Attention: Union Opportunities