

## Railroad Retirement Board

## § 295.2

(c) Other evidence which establishes the annuitant's ability to manage or direct the management of benefits.

### § 266.15 Transfer of accumulated benefit payments.

A representative payee who has conserved or invested funds from railroad retirement payments made to him or her on behalf of an annuitant shall, upon direction of the Board, transfer any such funds (including interest or dividends earned from investment of such funds) to a successor representative payee appointed by the Board, or, at the option of the Board, shall transfer such funds, including interest, to the Board for payment to a successor payee or to the annuitant.

## PART 295—PAYMENTS PURSUANT TO COURT DECREE OR COURT-APPROVED PROPERTY SETTLEMENT

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AUTHORITY: 45 U.S.C. 231f; 45 U.S.C. 231m.

SOURCE: 51 FR 12845, Apr. 16, 1986, unless otherwise noted.

### § 295.1 Introduction.

(a) *Purpose.* This part implements section 419 of Pub. L. 98-76 (97 Stat. 438), which amended section 14 of the Railroad Retirement Act to provide that, with respect to annuity amounts payable for months beginning with September 1983, the Board must comply with a court decree of divorce, annulment or legal separation, or with the terms of any court-approved property settlement incident to any such decree, which characterizes specified benefits as property subject to distribution. Garnishment of benefits for alimony or child support is dealt with in part 350 of this chapter.

(b) *Benefits subject to this part.* Only the following benefits or portions of benefits under the Railroad Retirement Act are subject to this part:

(1) Employee annuity net tier II benefit component as provided under section 3(b) of the Railroad Retirement Act;

(2) Employee annuity vested dual benefit component as provided under section 3(h) of the Act;

(3) Employee annuity net proportionate share of the annuity increases as provided under section 3(f) of the Act; and

(4) Supplemental annuities as provided under section 2(b) of the Act.

### § 295.2 Definitions.

As used in this part—

*Act* means the Railroad Retirement Act.

*Court* means any court of competent jurisdiction of any state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands; any court of the United States (as defined in section 451 of title 28 of the United States Code) having competent jurisdiction; any Indian court as defined by section 1301 of title 25 of the United States Code; or any court of competent jurisdiction of a foreign country with which the United States has an agreement requiring the United States to honor any court order of such country.

*Court decree* means a final decree of divorce, dissolution, annulment, or legal separation issued by a court (including a final decree or order modifying the terms of a previously issued decree of divorce, dissolution, annulment, or legal separation), which is issued in accordance with the laws of the jurisdiction of that court and which provides for the division of property.

*Division of property* means any transfer of property or its value by an individual to his or her spouse or former spouse in compliance with any community property settlement, equitable distribution of property, or other distribution of property between spouses or former spouses, which is intended as a present and complete settlement of the property rights of the parties.

*Employee* means an individual who is or was formerly an employee as defined by part 203 of this chapter.

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*Final decree* means a decree from which no appeal may be taken or from which no appeal has been taken within the time allowed for taking such appeals under the laws applicable to such appeals, or a decree from which timely appeal has been taken and such appeal has been finally decided under the laws applicable to such appeals.

*Property settlement* means an agreement between the parties to a suit for divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation in which they expressly agree to a division of their property rights, and which is incorporated in the final decree; is filed with the court in connection with a suit for divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation; or is otherwise presented to the court in a suit in accordance with the law of the jurisdiction. An agreement assigning or transferring property between spouses is not within the purview of this part unless it is subsequently approved by a court in connection with a suit for divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation.

*Spouse or former spouse* means the husband or wife, or former husband or wife, respectively, of an employee who, on or before the date of a court order, was married to the employee.

**§ 295.3 Documentation and service.**

(a) *Court decree or property settlement.* The Board will honor a court decree or a property settlement which meets the following criteria:

(1) The court decree or property settlement must provide that the spouse or former spouse is awarded payments from railroad retirement annuities payable to the railroad employee.

(2) The court decree or property settlement must specify an amount to be paid to the spouse or former spouse.

(3) The court decree or property settlement must obligate the Board to make payments directly to the spouse or former spouse.

(4) The court decree or property settlement must clearly identify both the employee and the spouse or former spouse to whom payments are to be made.

(5) The court decree or property settlement submitted to the Board must be a recently certified copy of the doc-

ument filed with the court. Where the award is made in an order modifying and earlier court decree, copies of both the original decree and the subsequent order must be furnished. In the case of a court-approved property settlement, both the settlement and any decree or order incorporating or approving the settlement must be provided.

(b) *Date of decree.* While only benefits payable for months after August, 1983 are subject to this part, the date the decree is entered or the property settlement is approved may precede September 1, 1983. A subsequent modification of a decree which was entered or a property settlement which was approved prior to September 1, 1983 must be in accord with the law of the jurisdiction in which the original decree was entered or the property settlement was approved.

(c) *Supporting documentation.* The spouse or former spouse shall submit such additional documentation as the Board shall require, including but not limited to:

(1) Identifying information concerning the employee such as social security number, railroad retirement claim number, full name, date of birth, and current address.

(2) Identifying information concerning the spouse or former spouse such as social security number, full name, and current address.

(3) A statement that—

(i) No condition of the law of the jurisdiction in which the decree was entered or the property settlement approved and no condition contained in the decree or agreement which requires termination of payment has occurred;

(ii) If any such condition does occur, the spouse or former spouse will immediately notify the Board; and

(iii) The spouse or former spouse agrees to repay any erroneous payment arising from occurrence of any such condition.

(d) *Delivery.* Any court decree or property settlement must be delivered by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested, or by personal service, to the Deputy General Counsel of the Railroad Retirement Board, 844 Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611. Where the decree or property settlement is delivered to any other office of

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the Board, it shall not be considered delivered until the date it is received by the Deputy General Counsel. Where the decree or property settlement was furnished to any office of the Board prior to September 1, 1983, delivery is not accomplished until a copy is received by the Deputy General Counsel subsequent to August 30, 1983.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 3220-0042)

### § 295.4 Review of documentation.

(a) *Regularity.* The Deputy General Counsel or his or her designee shall review the court decree or property settlement to determine that it complies with both the law of the jurisdiction, and with Federal law and these regulations.

(b) *Amount.* Ambiguities in the amount to be paid the spouse or former spouse shall be resolved in accord with expressed indications of the court's intent, except that:

(1) Where the amount is expressed in terms of a dollar figure:

(i) If the figure exceeds the total benefits which may be allocated under this part, the excess will be disregarded, provided that any future increase in the benefits subject to this part will be prospectively applied to the excess effective with the date of the benefit increase.

(ii) If the figure is less than the total benefits which may be allocated under this part, only the amount specified will be paid.

(2) Where the amount is expressed as a fraction, percentage, or ratio:

(i) The amount specified shall be applied only against benefits subject to this part, irrespective of the wording of the decree or property settlement.

(ii) When the amount is expressed in terms of a fraction or ratio referring to the length of railroad service, years shall be converted into the equivalent months. If the length of railroad service specified in the decree or property settlement exceeds the number of creditable service months used by the Board to determine the employee's years of service for calculating an annuity, the actual number used by the Board shall be substituted. If the decree understates the actual number of creditable railroad service months, the

number of years or months set forth in the decree or property settlement will be used.

(3) An amount may be expressed in any other fashion only to the extent to which it may be readily ascertained from records maintained by the Board in the regular course of administration of the Act.

(c) *Notification.* The Deputy General Counsel or his or her designee shall make reasonable effort to notify the spouse or former spouse and the employee of a determination that the decree or property settlement does or does not qualify as a decree or property settlement which will be honored pursuant to this part. This notice will be mailed to the most recent address of each party or representative of each party as shown in the Board's records. A copy of the decree or property settlement will be provided to the employee with this notice. The notice must state:

(1) The rationale for a determination that the decree or property settlement does not comply with this part; or

(2) The dollar amount or proportion of benefits which will be paid to the spouse or former spouse.

(d) *Withholding after notification.* (1) Where the Deputy General Counsel or his or her designee has notified the spouse or former spouse that a decree or property settlement will be honored under this part, but where the employee is not then entitled to any benefits subject to division under this part, the Associate Executive Director for Retirement Claims will notate the Board's records to reflect both the amount of benefits awarded to the spouse or former spouse pursuant to the decree or property settlement and his or her current address. Where the employee is currently entitled to benefits subject to this part, and the spouse or former spouse has furnished all additional documentation required, the Associate Executive Director for Retirement Claims will take action to withhold from the employee's monthly benefit the amount stated in the Deputy General Counsel's notice under paragraph (c) of this section that the Board will honor the decree or property settlement.

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(2) Where the employee was not entitled to benefits subject to this part at the time of the notice by the Deputy General Counsel that the Board will honor the decree or property settlement, but the employee becomes so entitled at a later time, the Board will attempt to contact the spouse or former spouse at the most recent address shown in the Board's records. The notice will inform the spouse or former spouse that an annuity has been awarded, that the spouse or former spouse may, upon submission of all required documentation, receive a portion of the annuity, and that the spouse or former spouse should contact the Board within three months from the date of the notice. The Associate Executive Director for Retirement Claims will initiate withholding of the amount awarded to the spouse or former spouse from the employee's monthly benefit, and will continue to withhold this amount for three successive months; provided, that an initial annuity payment for a retroactive period shall count as one monthly benefit payment. If after the third month's payment has been withheld the Board has received no response from the spouse or former spouse, the amount withheld from the employee's benefit shall be paid to the employee, and the Board take no further action regarding the decree until the spouse or former spouse contacts the board.

(3) Benefits withheld from the employee may not be paid to a spouse or former spouse until the spouse or former spouse has furnished all supporting documentation required pursuant to § 295.3 of this part. The Board shall allow a reasonable time, not to exceed three months from the date of the initial response from the spouse or former spouse, for the submission of all required documentation. If the documentation is not furnished within the time allowed, payment of the amounts withheld shall be made to the employee.

(4) Any payments made to the employee subsequent to the three-month notice period specified in paragraphs (d)(2) and (3) of this section, and prior to receipt of a response or required documentation from the spouse or former spouse, shall be considered properly paid to the employee and the board

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shall have no further liability to the spouse or former spouse with respect to such amounts.

### § 295.5 Limitations.

(a) *Employee benefit entitlement.* Payments will be made to a spouse or former spouse under this part only if the employee has been awarded an annuity under the Railroad Retirement Act. Payments to a spouse or former spouse shall be made only for months and from such amounts with respect to which an annuity is payable to the employee, and shall be suspended or terminated for any month in which the annuity of the employee is suspended or terminated. No arrearage accrues to the spouse or former spouse with respect to any month for which the annuity of the employee is suspended or reduced as required under the Act.

(b) *Minimum amount.* The amount of payment to a spouse or former spouse may not be less than one dollar per month.

(c) *Prospective payment.* Payment to a spouse or former spouse may accrue no earlier than the later of the date of delivery, pursuant to § 295.3 of this part, of a court decree or property settlement which will be honored under this part, or from October 1, 1983. The amount to be paid the spouse or former spouse under this part will not be increased to satisfy an arrearage due from the employee.

(d) *Payees.* Payment of an amount awarded to a spouse or former spouse by a court decree or property settlement will be made only to the spouse or former spouse except where the Board determines that another person shall be recognized to act in behalf of the spouse or former spouse as provided by part 266 of this chapter, relating to incompetence. Payment will not be made to the heirs, legatees, creditors or assignees of a spouse or former spouse, except that where an amount is payable to a spouse or former spouse pursuant to this part, but is unpaid at the death of that spouse or former spouse, the unpaid amount may be paid in accordance with § 234.1 of this chapter, pertaining to employee annuities unpaid at death.

(e) *Net amount of benefits.* Notwithstanding the terms of the decree or

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property settlement, the amount of benefits payable to the employee which are subject to this part shall not include:

(1) Amounts deducted to satisfy a debt due the United States, including any amount withheld to recover erroneous payments under the Railroad Retirement Act, Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, or any other acts administered by the Board; and

(2) Benefits which are waived pursuant to § 243.6 of this chapter.

(f) *Termination.* Payments to a spouse or former spouse terminate on the earlier of—

(1) The date on which the employee annuity terminates;

(2) The date required by the court decree or property settlement or the law of the jurisdiction in which the court decree or property settlement was entered; or

(3) The last day of the month before the month in which the spouse or former spouse dies.

(g) *Priority.* In the event that the Deputy General Counsel receives more than one decree or property settlement from competing parties, benefits shall be available to satisfy the decrees or property settlements on a first come, first served basis governed by the date of receipt by the Deputy General Counsel. Conflicting decrees or property settlements received on the same day shall be accorded priority based upon the earliest date upon which the decree or property settlement became final.

[51 FR 12845, Apr. 16, 1986, as amended at 53 FR 35807, Sept. 15, 1988; 62 FR 67724, Dec. 30, 1997]

### § 295.6 Disclosure of information.

(a) *Immunity from process.* The provision for the payment of benefits under this part pursuant to a court decree or property settlement shall not be construed to be a waiver of the sovereign immunity of the Railroad Retirement Board as an agency of the U.S. Government. The Board may not be joined in a suit for divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation, or otherwise subjected to the jurisdiction of any state court. Subpoenas, notices of joinder, interrogatories, orders for production of documents, and like state process issued in connection with a suit for

divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation will be treated as requests for disclosure of information under this section.

(b) *Request for information.* A response to request for information to be used in connection with a suit for divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation may be made by the Deputy General Counsel or his or her designee, by the Associate Executive Director for Retirement Claims, or by a contact representative of the Board's field service.

(c) *Information available.* In the absence of signed authorization from the employee, a spouse or former spouse who is a party to a suit for divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation, or his or her legal representative, may be furnished the amount of benefits the employee is currently receiving. If the employee is not currently entitled to benefits, the Board may furnish the amount of any estimated benefit to which the employee would be entitled if he or she were of retirement age at the time of the request, as reflected by the records of the Board, to the extent it is possible for the Board to compute such amount. The Board shall not be required to furnish the present value of future benefits, the amount of benefits payable at a future date, or any other computations based on statistics or procedures not maintained by the Board in the normal course of administration of the Act.

(d) *Certification.* A letter or statement prepared by a Board official in the regular course of duty from the official records of the Board, which refers to the authority of this section and bears his or her signature, shall be a sufficient response for purposes of discharging the responsibilities of the Board under this section. A certification in accordance with this section may be considered a public document for purposes of admissibility as evidence of present or potential benefits under the Act for use in a divorce, dissolution, annulment or legal separation proceeding.

### § 295.7 Miscellaneous.

(a) *Disbursement cycle.* In honoring and complying with a court decree or property settlement, the Board shall

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not be required to disrupt its normal disbursement cycle, despite any special schedule of accrual or payment of amounts due the spouse or former spouse set forth in the decree or settlement. A decree or settlement received too late to be honored during the disbursement cycle in which it was received shall be honored with respect to the next payment due the employee.

(b) *Liability for payments.* Neither the Board nor any of its employees shall be liable with respect to any payment made to any individual from moneys due from or payable by the Board pursuant to a court decree or property settlement regular on its face, if such payment is made in accordance with this part.

(c) *Liability for disclosures.* No employee of the Board whose duties include responding to requirements contained in this part shall be subject under any law to any disciplinary action or civil or criminal liability or penalty for, or on account of, any disclosure of information made by such employee in connection with the per-

formance of the employee's duties in making such response.

(d) *Applicable law.* For purposes of a proceeding under this part, the Board will apply the law of the jurisdiction in which the court decree or property settlement was issued unless it comes to the attention of the Board that the state of issuance has no contact with the plaintiff or defendant in the action; in which case, the Board may, in its sole discretion, apply the law of any jurisdiction with significant interest in the matter.

(e) *Erroneous payments.* If a spouse or former spouse receives a payment pursuant to this part from an employee's benefit, and the Board later determines that the employee was not entitled to all or part of those benefits for any month, the amount of the employee's benefits which was paid to the spouse or former spouse in excess of the amount which was actually payable shall be an erroneous payment to the spouse or former spouse within the meaning of section 10 of the Railroad Retirement Act.