

North Carolina State University
Group Insurance & Benefits Committee (GIBC)

Monday, March 13, 2023

11:00 am

via Zoom

Members Present: Gwen Hazlehurst, Janice Sitzes, Jonathan Holloway, Lynn Whittenberger, Jill Phipps, Tracy Brown, Carrie Levow

Members Absent: Cheryl Xu, Katie Jennings, Stephen Porter, Glen Almond, Duane Akroyd, Heidi Schweizer, Craig Friend

Ex-Officio Members Present: Gareth Washington, Steve Norris

Ex-Officio Members Absent: Margaret Erickson

Call to Order: Gwen Hazlehurst, Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:05 am.

Minutes: The committee reviewed and approved the 5/5/2023 meeting minutes.

Old Business:

Bereavement Leave Update

Member, Jill Phipps, will be meeting with the UNC System Staff Assembly on April 3-4 to discuss moving forward with the bereavement leave policy proposal. The proposal will request additional leave for bereavement. If additional days cannot be added, Jill provided that we will propose the usage of personal observance leave and/or community service leave for bereavement. Jill plans to approach the leave proposal from the perspective that many benefits have been taken away from state employees, and the approval of this bereavement leave policy would add value to the offered benefits.

Chair, Gwen Hazlehurst, and Jill Phipps discussed the different types of leave currently available to employees, and identified that the proposal would seek to include the community service leave and personal observance leave as bereavement leave options.

Member, Carrie Levow, provided that the bereavement leave proposal which seeks to include community service leave as an alternative to bereavement leave would contradict the original intent and purpose of community service leave. In doing their research, Jill Phipps provided that many employees never use the allotted 24 hours for community service leave which is why the proposal sought to include it as an alternative for bereavement leave. Member, Janice Sitzes, agreed with Carrie Levow regarding the intent of the community service leave. Instead of including community service leave, Carrie Levow suggested that the proposal seek to include paid parental leave which is only utilized by a certain group of people in certain circumstances. Jill Phipps praised the idea of including paid parental leave as an alternative and will include it in the proposal to the UNC System Staff Assembly in April.

New Business:

COVID Booster Leave Deadline

Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, reminded the committee that the period for employees to utilize their COVID booster leave ends March 31, 2023. Employees should have submitted the proper documentation of the COVID booster prior to March 10, 2023 to have received the leave. Communication has gone out regarding the deadlines. Gareth Washington also provided that more communication should be sent out in the HR Newsletter in the next week to remind employees to utilize this leave before it expires.

New Personal Observance Leave

Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, also reminded the committee that employees have a new type of leave for a day of personal significance. This personal observance leave must be used within the calendar year. The leave will expire if not used by December 31 of any given year. A new 8 hours of personal observance leave will be given for the new year.

Benefit Vendor Communications

Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, stated that many employees are receiving communications regarding their retirement plans from external vendors that are not affiliated with NCSU or the UNC System. If the communication is not from TIAA, Fidelity, or CAPTRUST it is not associated with the University. Gareth Washington encouraged the committee to caution employees who receive this communication due to the impacts that can occur if proper information is not provided. A major impact for many retirees that choose to withdraw their funds from their retirement account is that they may forfeit their retiree health coverage.

Member, Jill Phipps, added that she has encountered these emails with employees and questioned if employees nearing retirement will receive any communications from the vendors affiliated with the UNC System or the University Benefits Office. Gareth Washington provided that employees will not receive communication from the benefits office. Employees should schedule appointments with the benefits office to learn more about retirement. Due to staffing shortages and the volume of requests, Gareth added that appointments are prioritized based on the anticipated date of retirement.

Jill Phipps also inquired about the eligibility for the retiree medical plans and the cost associated with the plans. Gareth Washington stated that for employees hired prior to October 1, 2006 and who completed five years of service, the state will cover the cost of the retiree's coverage. For those employees hired on/after October 1, 2006, but before January 1, 2021, the cost of coverage will vary based on the years of service. Employees hired on/after January 1, 2021 are not eligible to receive retiree medical benefits. More information on rates and the cost of coverage can be found on the benefits website.

Chair, Gwen Hazlehurst, shared that she has heard good feedback from employees on the broken down, topic specific sessions for Ready to Retire. Gwen shared that many employees have praised the team for the very informative sessions and for quick and detailed responses to questions during the sessions. Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, added that the benefits team will continue to host the regular full-day Ready to Retire workshop as well as the multiple topic focused sessions in the future to accommodate as many employees as possible. Gareth also suggested that these workshops are great resources for those considering retirement in a few years.

If 65 and under when retiring, you can keep active employee coverage. If age 65 or over, you will need to choose. When BCBS goes away, these plans should remain the same as they are two separate contracts.

Medicare - State Health Plan

Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, shared with the committee that the plans offered to retirees should not change with the State Health Plan vendor change to come in 2025. The contract for active employees remains separate from the contract for retirees. Thus, the change should not affect the retiree medical plans.

Member, Carrie Levow, inquired about which plans a retiree can choose if retiring prior to age 65. Gareth Washington stated that employees retiring prior to age 65 can maintain the same plan as the plan for active employees.

State Health Plan Vendor Change in 2025

Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, provided that the state has announced its plan to move from Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC to Aetna in 2025. The benefits team has received many questions and concerns regarding this change, but the team does not have many answers at this time. More communications will come as we get closer to open enrollment in 2024.

Member, Janice Sitzes, questioned if the vendor change could impact in-network providers. Gareth Washington provided that this is always a potential, but at this time there has been no further information provided. Chair, Gwen Hazlehurst, added that she has also heard many concerns and reasons for the vendor change. Gwen also questioned if there was any documentation released by the State Health Plan to help many employees understand the change. Gareth Washington stated that the State Health Plan has released some information for employees.

Other Topics of Discussion

Employee Retention with Declining Benefits

Member, Jill Phipps, questioned if the retiree medical coverage would once again be offered for new employees hired after January 1, 2021. Ex-officio member, Gareth Washington, suggested that retiree health coverage will likely not be offered again in the future due to the cost that the state would acquire. Jill shared that many employees feel that the retiree medical plans were great incentives for state employees, and the removal of these benefits may affect staffing. Gareth also stated that many private industry employers do not offer retiree medical

plans. Gwen Hazlehurst, mentioned that a decline in benefits shows an increasing need for competitive salaries.

Chair, Gwen Hazlehurst, brought up another item that they share with new hires and candidates is the ability to rollover of up to 240 hours of annual leave to the next year and the accrual of sick leave. Gareth cautioned that employees are not able to use accrued sick leave for just any reason.

NC State's Focus on Mental Health

Gwen Hazlehurst emphasized the University's focus on employee and student mental health. Gareth Washington also announced the newest member of the University Benefits Team, Kelly Vance, who has been hired into the Wellness, Child Care, and Perks positions.

Member, Janice Sitzes, also shared the WolfPack Wellness Program in which employees can earn a digital badge for completing seminars, activities, etc. on wellness.

Business for Next Meeting: Elect committee chair for 2023-2024, update on the bereavement leave proposal to the UNC System Staff Assembly (Jill Phipps)

Adjournments

Gwen Hazlehurst, Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:59 am.