

# STATE OF ALASKA

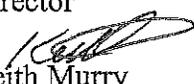
Department of Administration  
Division of Personnel & Labor Relations

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## Memorandum

To: Nicki Neal  
Director

Thru:   
Keith Murry  
Class Studies Supervisor

From: Brandon Cullum   
Human Resource Specialist II

Date: May 1, 2012

Subject: Retirement and Benefits Job Class Study Phase I – Retirement and Benefits Technicians

### Preamble:

In 2011, The Department of Administration's Division of Retirement and Benefits requested a job class study of the Retirement and Benefits Specialist and Retirement and Benefits Technician job class series.

The study request coincided with the procurement of outside consultant services to review the Division's structure. The intent of the review was to capture efficiencies and streamline workflow to better position the Division for an impending period of unprecedented growth in retirement and health plan members.

As a product of the consultative review, the Division is consolidating its Retirement and Benefits sections. This consolidation has substantial impact on the on the work assigned to the Division's operations-related professional and technical staff.

The Division's plan for consolidation requires a staggered study implementation. Classification will implement final recommendations for the technical group of positions first and the specialists second. Subsequently, this memo provides study analysis and recommendations for

the Retirement and Benefits Technician job class series. Analysis and recommendations for the Retirement and Benefits Specialist series component of the study will follow in a separate memo.

**Study Scope:**

This analysis evaluates the alignment of work performed by the 37 positions assigned to the Division's three unique technical job classes -- Retirement and Benefits Technician I, II, and III.

**Study Contacts:**

The primary study contact in the division is Kathy Lea, Deputy Director. Other active contacts are Bernadet Blankenship, Retirement and Benefits Manager, and Jim Puckett, Director.

**History of Related Job Classes:**

In 1973, the first Retirement and Benefits Technician job class (R12) was established to align the Division's technical operations responsibilities with a more relevant skill set than the Administrative Assistants used up to this point. Incumbents of the new job class performed a variety of subprofessional operational and administrative duties in providing retirement, insurance, benefits, deferred compensation, and longevity bonus program processing, assistance, and information.

In 1981, the Retirement and Benefits Technician job class was revised to reflect changing knowledge, skill and ability requirements and a training level was added, creating the Retirement and Benefits Technician I/II job class (R10/12, respectively). Retirement and Benefits Technician I/II was jointly defined as a job class where incumbents received training in or performed a variety of operational and administrative duties in providing retirement, insurance, supplemental benefits, deferred compensation, and/or longevity bonus benefits to members of the retirement and benefits program.

A 1994 Retirement and Benefits Study added the Retirement and Benefits Technician III job class to the series. Incumbents of the new class provided information and technical assistance and limited counseling service to members, employees and employers, retirees, survivors, insurance carriers and plan administrators. They also counseled participants about program options, rights and responsibilities; completed and verified service, indebtedness, and benefit payment calculations; and reviewed, approved, and processed applications, enrollment, and change forms related to the various retirement and benefit programs administered by the State. This study established lead level authority for the third level as permissive, but not class controlling, feature of the class.

At an undetermined time after the 1994 study, Retirement and Benefits Technician III was redefined from a position that "may lead the work of technical and clerical staff," to one that

“leads the work of technical and clerical staff.” This change made leadership over technical and clerical staff a class-controlling feature.

### Class Analysis:

The State’s classification plan provides for the grouping of positions into job classes when they are sufficiently similar with respect to duties and responsibilities, degree of supervision exercised and received, and entrance requirements so that: 1) the same title can be used to clearly identify each position; 2) the same minimum qualifications for initial appointment can be established for all positions; 3) the same rate of basic pay can be fairly applied to all positions; and 4) employees in a particular class are considered an appropriate group for purposes of lay off and recall. Job classes should be constructed as broadly as feasible as long as the tests of similarity are met.

### Retirement and Benefits Technician I

The Retirement and Benefits Technician I job class is the trainee level of the series. Use of this class requires the simultaneous application of a flexibly staffed training plan to prepare incumbents for promotion to Retirement and Benefits Technician II. This class is no longer used; recruitments attract incumbents with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to enter the series at the Retirement and Benefits Technician II level and routine training programs produce incumbents that meet the standards for transition to permanent status within the allotted probationary period.

Recommendation: Abolish the Retirement and Benefits Technician I job class.

### Retirement and Benefits Technician II

Consolidation of the Division’s Retirement and Benefits sections, and the growth of increasingly complex processing requirements in the Finance section, has increased the complexity of work associated with the second level of the series. In the consolidated Retirement and Benefits section Retirement and Benefits Technicians II now process a wider array of membership issues that require learning multiple components of employee benefits (retirement eligibility requirements across many plans in addition to benefits eligibility requirements across many plans, for example) where previously they were only expected to learn one (retirement eligibility or benefits eligibility).

In the Finance section, Retirement and Benefits Technicians II process payroll to members and contributions from members and employers for a similarly growing array of plans. Incumbents are now responsible for working with more independence as Retirement and Benefits Technicians III move away from lead roles to engage a more active technical counseling role for employers having trouble navigating the contribution system.

Prior to this study Retirement and Benefits Technicians II were defined as a job class where incumbents work under general supervision to complete service, indebtedness and benefit

calculations; process applications, enrollment and change forms; and provide information and technical assistance to participants, employers and carriers for the retirement and benefits programs administered by the State. The performance of routine, recurring assignments without frequent review, based on specific instructions or established statutes, regulations, program booklets, policies and procedures distinguished incumbents of this class. Incumbents refer unusual, sensitive or controversial issues to the supervisor for discussion and/or resolution.

Recommendation: Redefine Retirement and Benefits Technician II as a job class where incumbents work under direct supervision to perform basic processing and research tasks to support delivery of a single division service, or to perform broader developmental duties while completing a defined training program to facilitate advancement to the journey level of the series.

This class's distinguishing characteristics include the performance of entry-level work guided by unambiguous policy, procedure, and statute to complete routine technical processing associated with the delivery of division services. The work is primarily devoid of complicating factors that may result from dissatisfied members, the need to correct division mistakes, perform complex calculations, certify other technician's work, or that involve unprecedented situations for which no procedure exists.

### Retirement and Benefits Technician III

Division consolidation has the most significant impact on the Retirement and Benefits Technician III job class. Incumbents of this class are no longer primarily oriented toward leading lower level technicians. The job class is now more defined by its incumbents' responsibility for providing low-intensity member counseling, performing the most complex technical processing, and providing employer training. Division consolidation creates an environment where the complexity of the new duties is compounded by the broader scope of knowledge about a wider array of programs in which each incumbent is required to maintain proficiency. At this level, an incumbent's primary duty requires comprehensive knowledge of a single service channel (Retirement Processing or Death and Disability units, for example) or general knowledge of all service channels (Call Center staff provide and process information relevant to all unit services). Despite these discrete roles, limited staffing in the face of growing service demands require the division to cross train each position to cover missing capacity as workflow demands shift for various reasons. This creates an environment where this level of technician is ultimately required to learn in-depth knowledge of all division service channels.

Recommendation: Redefine Retirement and Benefits Technician III as a job class where incumbents work under general supervision to either perform comprehensive technical duties in a single division service with significant member contact, or to act as the primary point of contact for members seeking technical information about their status relative to a wide array of division services. In both cases, the work requires significant statutory and policy knowledge and the ability to perform complex calculations guided by many discrete requirements.

The performance of comprehensive journey-level technical duties in a single Division service distinguishes this class's incumbents. They are the first level of technicians that regularly work to resolve customer dissatisfaction, correct Division mistakes, perform complex calculations, certify other technician's work, or research procedures for unprecedented situations. While incumbents of this class perform primary duties that routinely require the application of either in-depth knowledge of one division service, or general knowledge of all division services, incumbents of this class will develop skills to transition from one role to the other as agency workload demands.

Class Title:

A class title should be the best descriptive title for the work. An appropriate class title will convey concisely and accurately the kind and level of work performed, should be brief, easily recognized, gender neutral, and understood by potential applicants.

Retirement and Benefits Technicians still perform a wide range of technical duties to support the operations of the Division of Retirement and Benefits, and as such remain appropriately titled.

The following chart illustrates changes to the class titles.

Legacy	Revised
Retirement and Benefits Technician I	job class abolished
Retirement and Benefits Technician II	Retirement and Benefits Technician I
Retirement and Benefits Technician III	Retirement and Benefits Technician II

From this point, the memo addresses job classes by their revised titles.

Minimum Qualifications:

The minimum qualifications established for a job class must relate to the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the work and must not create an artificial barrier to employment of individuals in protected classes. Required training should be limited to the basic formal training that customarily prepares individuals for work in the field. Experience requirements are intended to ensure new employees can successfully perform the work after a period of orientation or familiarization. Required experience should be directly related to the actual duties of positions in the class and should not be equivalent to the work performed.

Minimum Qualifications for the Retirement and Benefits Technician I were previously designed to facilitate movement either from the now abolished trainee level or from advanced clerical classes. This minimum qualification update reflects abolishment of the trainee level of the series, and updates the list of qualifying job classes to reflect changes to job class definitions and titles since the 1994 study.

Minimum Qualification for the Retirement and Benefits Technician II were updated to reduce the amount of qualifying experience required in qualifying job classes to more closely match the amount of time it takes to gain proficiency in those classes.

Minimum Qualifications	
Retirement and Benefits Technician I	Retirement and Benefits Technician II
<p>Six months of advanced clerical experience in an office environment where the work supported the efforts of technical or professional staff, and required some application of guidelines and policies to meet assigned responsibilities.</p> <p>“Application of guidelines or policy,” means written direction or generally accepted theory, from which deviation is not a common option, dictates the nature and process of the work.</p> <p>In the State of Alaska, the experience is equivalent to Office Assistant II, Office Assistant III, Accounting Clerk, and Statistical Clerk.</p>	<p>Six months of entry-level technical experience that required applying basic knowledge of a retirement program, benefits program, human resources policy, or labor relations guidelines, or in preparing, receiving, reviewing and processing health, life, or disability insurance claims or payments, or processing documents for financial planning.</p> <p>“Processing,” means responsibility for performing basic calculations, the accuracy of the information, and its compliance with policy and guidelines.</p> <p>In the State of Alaska, this level of experience is equivalent to Retirement &amp; Benefits Technician I, Human Resources Technician I, Administrative Assistant I, Budget Analyst I, Insurance Licensing Examiner I, and Accounting Technician I.</p>

Class Outline:

A Class Code is assigned based on the placement of the job class in the classification schematic of Occupational Groups and Job Families. Occupational Groups are made up of related Job Families and encompass relatively broad occupations, professions, or activities. Job Families are groups of job classes and class series that are related as to the nature of the work performed and typically have similar initial preparation for employment and career progression.

Job Class	Class Code	AKPAY Code
Retirement and Benefits Technician I	PB0332	P1444
Retirement and Benefits Technician II	PB0333	P1445

Fair Labor Standards Act

The positions in this study are covered by the minimum wage and maximum hour provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as Amended (FLSA). While exemption from the provisions of the Act are based on the specific circumstances of an individual employee on a

work-week basis, there are general aspects of the classes and their influence on the exemptions for employees in bona fide executive, professional, or administrative positions that can be addressed in general.

The routine work associated with Retirement and Benefits Technicians I and II does not meet the criteria set forth in the FLSA for either administrative, executive, or professional exemption. As such, it is unlikely that the State will determine that an incumbent of either class is overtime exempt under terms of the Act.

### **Salary Analysis:**

The salary range of a job class is determined based on internal consistency within the State's pay plans, in accordance with merit principles, with the goal of providing fair and reasonable compensation for services rendered and maintaining the principle of like pay for like work. In evaluating internal consistency the difficulty, responsibility, knowledge, skills, and other characteristics of a job are compared with job classes of a similar nature, kind, and level in the same occupational group and job family or related job families.

Classification has not reviewed Retirement and Benefits Technician salary alignment since the 1994 Retirement and Benefits Study. That study's *Internal Salary Analysis* compared Retirement and Benefits Technician I (then as II) to other technical classes in the Personnel and Employee Relations (PB03) job family, and compared Retirement and Benefits Technician II (then as III) to technical classes in the broader and now redefined and re-titled Clerical, Fiscal, and Administrative job group. Classification applied different scopes of comparison to the two classes because the higher level was a newly created job class and substantiated a wider comparison for initial salary assignment.

Today Classification makes salary-alignment comparisons within the same family whenever an acceptable comparable class exists. In the Personnel and Employee Relations (PB03) job family, Retirement and Benefits Technicians compare well with Human Resource Technicians. The two series together provide what constitutes comprehensive technical-level personnel and employee relations services from the State.

The entry level Human Resource Technician I (SR12), defined as an entry level technical human resource job class where the work requires completing, processing and auditing documents and providing technical information and assistance to managers, employees and the public in support of a departmental, Division of Personnel and Labor Relations, or Division of Finance human resource program. Incumbents of this class are assigned routine, recurring technical duties that are well defined, require attention to detail, and are completed in compliance with specific instructions and readily identifiable and obviously applicable guides. Duties associated with this class rarely require deviation from standard procedure.

Incumbents of the Retirement and Benefits Technician I job class work under direct supervision to perform basic processing and research tasks to support delivery of a single division service, or to perform broader developmental duties while completing a defined training program to facilitate advancement to the journey level of the series. This class' work is guided by unambiguous policy, procedure, and statute that and includes the completion of routine technical processing associated with the delivery of division services. The work is primarily devoid of complicating factors like dealing with dissatisfied members or ambiguous policy.

Retirement and Benefits Technician I and Human Resource Technician I compare very well on multiple points. Incumbents of both classes are trained to have basic knowledge of a wide array of their division's services but are generally tasked with duties that are limited to one specific service channel; use clear guidelines originating from multiple sources; and have higher-level technical support immediately available. Consequences of error can be very similar for both classes: because work is reviewed on completion, an error's impact is normally relegated to a pause in workflow and a delay in services while corrections are made; an effective system of checks and balances imposed on both classes is designed to preclude a more significant impact.

The similarity between these two classes supports continued alignment of Retirement and Benefits Technician I to the salary range 12.

A review a comparables for the Retirement and Benefits Technician II requires consideration of both Human Resources Technician II (SR14) and III (SR15).

Human Resource Technicians II perform journey level technical human resource work by completing, processing and auditing documents and providing technical information and assistance to managers, employees and the public in support of a departmental, Division of Personnel or Division of Finance human resource program. Positions in this class perform a broad scope of technical tasks in compliance with standard methods and established guides and routinely take or effectively recommend action and correct errors in situations that require interpretation, coordination or reconciliation of multiple guides. Decisions typically affect an individual person, or a single event or transaction rather than large groups or systems.

Human Resource Technicians III either supervise personnel and payroll units containing two or more Human Resource Technicians II, or have significant responsibility for developing technical training programs for lower level technical services staff and for developing and documenting program policy, procedures and workflow processes. Incumbents have substantial involvement in production payroll, are responsible for handling unusual or sensitive technical matters on a regular basis, analyze existing work methods and procedures, develop new work processes, and recommend implementation to higher-level positions.

Between these two technical human resource classes, the Human Resource Technician II aligns much more favorably with Retirement and Benefits Technician II. Human Resources Technicians III are tasked with greater responsibility as indicated by their definitive supervision and their

involvement in policy and process development and training. Human Resource Technician II, like the Retirement and Benefits Technician II, is more closely associated with applying a wide array of program knowledge to perform all but the most complex technical line duties.

The similarity between Human Resource Technician II and Retirement and Benefits Technician II support continued alignment of the latter to salary range 14.

**Conclusions:**

Class Structure:

- Abolish Retirement and Benefits Technician I
- Re-title Retirement and Benefits Technician II as Retirement and Benefits Technician I
- Re-title Retirement and Benefits Technician III as Retirement and Benefits Technician II

Salary Alignment

- Retirement and Benefits Technician I – salary range 12
- Retirement and Benefits Technician II – salary range 14

FLSA

- Incumbents are overtime eligible

Attachment:

Final class specifications

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