



# Physical Disability Evaluation System and Transition Program

Report to Congress  
*September 15, 2023*



U.S. Coast Guard

# Foreword

September 15, 2023

I am pleased to present the following report, “Physical Disability Evaluation System and Transition Program,” prepared by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 directs the submission of a temporary policy that improves timeliness, communication, and outcomes for members of the Coast Guard undergoing the Physical Disability Evaluation System; affords maximum career transition benefits to members of the Coast Guard determined by a Medical Evaluation Board to be unfit for retention in the Coast Guard; and maximizes the potential separation and career transition benefits for members of the Coast Guard undergoing the Physical Disability Evaluation System, or a related formal or informal process.



Pursuant to Congressional requirements, this report is provided to the following members of Congress:

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you have, or your staff may contact my Senate Liaison Office at (202) 224-2913 or House Liaison Office at (202) 225-4775.

Sincerely,

Linda L. Fagan  
Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard  
Commandant



# Physical Disability Evaluation System and Transition Program

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# I. Legislative Language

This report responds to the language set forth in Section 11411(c) of the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 (Pub. L. No. 117-263), which reads:

**SEC. 11411. IMPROVEMENTS TO PHYSICAL DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM AND TRANSITION PROGRAM.**

(a) TEMPORARY POLICY.—Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commandant shall develop a temporary policy that—

- (1) improves timeliness, communication, and outcomes for members of the Coast Guard undergoing the Physical Disability Evaluation System, or a related formal or informal process;
- (2) affords maximum career transition benefits to members of the Coast Guard determined by a Medical Evaluation Board to be unfit for retention in the Coast Guard; and
- (3) maximizes the potential separation and career transition benefits for members of the Coast Guard undergoing the Physical Disability Evaluation System, or a related formal or informal process.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The policy required under subsection (a) shall include the following:

- (1) A requirement that any member of the Coast Guard who is undergoing the Physical Disability Evaluation System, or a related formal or informal process, shall be placed in a duty status that allows the member the opportunity to attend necessary medical appointments and other activities relating to the Physical Disability Evaluation System, including completion of any application of the Department of Veterans Affairs and career transition planning.
- (2) In the case of a Medical Evaluation Board report that is not completed not later than 120 days after the date on which an evaluation by the Medical Evaluation Board was initiated, the option for such a member to enter permissive duty status.
- (3) A requirement that the date of initiation of an evaluation by a Medical Evaluation Board shall include the date on which any verbal or written affirmation is made to the member, command, or medical staff that the evaluation by the Medical Evaluation Board has been initiated.
- (4) An option for such member to seek an internship under the SkillBridge program established under section 1143(e) of title 10, United States Code, and outside employment aimed at improving the transition of the member to civilian life, only if such an internship or employment does not interfere with necessary medical appointments required for the member's physical disability evaluation.
- (5) A requirement that not less than 21 days notice shall be provided to such a member for any such medical appointment, to the maximum extent practicable, to ensure that the appointment timeline is in the best interests of the immediate health of the member.

- (6) A requirement that the Coast Guard shall provide such a member with a written separation date upon the completion of a Medical Evaluation Board report that finds the member unfit to continue active duty.
- (7) To provide certainty to such a member with respect to a separation date, a policy that ensures—
- (A) that accountability measures are in place with respect to Coast Guard delays throughout the Physical Disability Evaluation System, including—
    - (i) placement of the member in an excess leave status after 270 days have elapsed since the date of initiation of an evaluation by a Medical Evaluation Board by any competent authority; and
    - (ii) a calculation of the costs to retain the member on active duty, including the pay, allowances, and other associated benefits of the member, for the period beginning on the date that is 90 days after the date of initiation of an evaluation by a Medical Evaluation Board by any competent authority and ending on the date on which the member is separated from the Coast Guard; and
  - (B) the availability of administrative solutions to any such delay.
- (8) With respect to a member of the Coast Guard on temporary limited duty status, an option to remain in the member's current billet, to the maximum extent practicable, or to be transferred to a different active-duty billet, so as to minimize any negative impact on the member's career trajectory.
- (9) A requirement that each respective command shall report to the Coast Guard Personnel Service Center any delay of more than 21 days between each stage of the Physical Disability Evaluation System for any such member, including between stages of the processes, the Medical Evaluation Board, the Informal Physical Evaluation Board, and the Formal Physical Evaluation Board.
- (10) A requirement that, not later than 7 days after receipt of a report of a delay described in paragraph (9), the Personnel Service Center shall take corrective action, which shall ensure that the Coast Guard exercises maximum discretion to continue the Physical Disability Evaluation System of such a member in a timely manner, unless such delay is caused by the member.
- (11) A requirement that—
- (A) a member of the Coast Guard shall be allowed to make a request for a reasonable delay in the Physical Disability Evaluation System to obtain additional input and consultation from a medical or legal professional; and
  - (B) any such request for delay shall be approved by the Commandant based on a showing of good cause by the member.
- (c) **REPORT ON TEMPORARY POLICY.**—Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commandant shall submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives a copy of the policy developed under subsection (a).

## II. Report

The Disability Evaluation System (DES) exists to ensure equitable application of provisions in Title 10, United States Code, Chapter 61, which relates to separation or retirement of military personnel by reason of physical disability. The Coast Guard currently operates a Physical Disability Evaluation System (PDES), a legacy type of DES. The military branches of the Department of Defense (DoD) utilize the Integrated Disability Evaluations System (IDES) as their primary evaluation system and a PDES for specialty cases. The Coast Guard is partnering with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and DoD in a joint pilot program for the Coast Guard's entry into IDES.

The Coast Guard's Physical Disability Evaluation System Manual, Military Separations Manual, and Commandant Instructions establish policy regarding standards for administering the DES for military personnel. The law<sup>1</sup> and Coast Guard policy define associated entitlements, benefits, and procedures afforded to members when they are processed for separation or retirement.

To address requirements in Section 11411(c) of the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022, the Coast Guard issued guidance to the Service via ALCOAST message 124/23<sup>2</sup> on March 29, 2023. This ALCOAST establishes the Coast Guard's temporary policy, and is included as Appendix A.

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<sup>1</sup> 10 U.S. Code Chapter 61-Retirement of Separation for Physical Disability.

<sup>2</sup> The Coast Guard uses a formal, internal message board that alerts the entire Service of official changes in policy and procedures. Official messages are regularly and routinely monitored by all members of the Coast Guard. ALCOAST messaging is also frequently discussed on MyCG, the Coast Guard's official workforce communication platform, to educate and inform the Coast Guard's active duty and reserve forces, civilian employees, Auxiliary, and their families. ALCOAST messaging is also summarized and distributed directly to all leadership service-wide by means of a weekly email newsletter called the *All Hands Briefer*. These efforts further expand circulation, visibility, and discussion of the relevant material.

### III. Conclusion

The Coast Guard implemented Sec. 11411(c) of the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act (Pub. L. No. 117-263) on March 29, 2023, with the release of ALCOAST 124/23. This policy effects changes to the PDES, expands transition program eligibility, increases process timeliness, and enhances availability of benefits for Coast Guard servicemembers. As the Coast Guard explores its transition to IDES and integrates with the VA and DoD, improvements from the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 will be included in updated policies and procedures. The larger objectives of personnel readiness and mission execution underscores the importance of DES efficiency and support of our servicemembers.

# Appendix A: ALCOAST Message

## ALCOAST Message 124/23 dated March 29, 2023

R 291228Z MAR 23 MID200080851373U

FM COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC

TO ALCOAST

BT

UNCLAS

ALCOAST 124/23

SSIC 1850

SUBJ: *UPDATED PROCEDURES TO PHYSICAL DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM (PDES)*

*A. National Defense Authorization Act of 2023, Section 11411*

*B. Physical Disability Evaluation System, COMDTINST M1850.2D*

*C. Military Assignments and Authorized Absences, COMDTINST M1000.8A*

*D. Reserve Policy Manual, COMDTINST M1001.28D*

*E. Transition of Service Members with Job Training Opportunities and Employment Skills under the Department of Defense (DOD) SkillBridge Voluntary Employment Skills Training Program, COMDTINST 1040.7*

*1. REF (A) requires the development of policy to:*

*a. Improve timeliness, communication, and outcomes for members undergoing PDES.*

*b. Afford maximum career transition benefits to members determined to be unfit for retention in the Coast Guard; and*

*c. Maximize potential separation and career transition benefits for members undergoing the PDES.*

*2. Through the Personnel Service Center (CG PSC) and Health, Safety & Work Life Directorate (CG-11), Assistant Commandant for Human Resources (CG-1) oversees the administration and application of associated programs and benefits for members undergoing the Coast Guard PDES process to ensure all cases are managed fairly, consistently, and in accordance with law and CG policy.*

*3. REFs (B) through (E) promulgate policies and standards associated with disability processing for Coast Guard service members. This message does not change or replace any policies contained in REFs (B) through (E).*

*4. In accordance with REF (A), for PDES cases initiated on or after 27 DEC 2022 and others as applicable, the following administrative processes are effective immediately:*

*a. Revised Duty Status: To the maximum extent practicable, upon recommendation of a military medical officer that a member is referred to the PDES process, the member shall be placed in a Temporary Limited Duty (TLD) status or other applicable duty status to allow the opportunity to attend necessary medical appointments and other activities relating to PDES.*

*b. TLD and Assignment: To the maximum extent practicable and in consultation with the applicable CG PSC-EPM/OPM/RPM Assignment Officer (AO), evaluatees on TLD status and anticipating PDES processing may be afforded an option to remain in their current billet, so as to minimize any negative impact on their career trajectory. Reserve members may be authorized Medical Support Allowance Billets IAW REF (D).*

*c. Notice of Medical Treatment: To the maximum extent practicable, an evaluatee will receive notification of any medical appointment no less than 21 days in advance to ensure the appointment timeline is in the best interests of the immediate health of the evaluatee.*

*d. Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) Initiation: The date of initiation of a MEB evaluation shall be the date of completion of the Medical Board Report Cover Sheet, CG-5684, describing the evaluatee's disqualifying conditions.*

*e. Permissive Duty Status: In the event that a MEB report is not completed within 120 days after initiation, the evaluatee may request Administrative Assignment in accordance with REF (C) to permit attendance to medical appointments upon consideration of the Primary Care Manager (PCM), member's command, and applicable CG-PSC AO.*

*f. Consultation with Attorney: On the same date an evaluatee is provided with the Evaluatee's Statement Regarding the Finding of the Medical Board Report, Form CG-4920, the evaluatee will be provided with an Election of Counsel Form, providing the opportunity to consult with a Disability Attorney from the Office of Member Advocacy (CG-LMA).*

*g. SkillBridge Availability: Active Duty evaluatees may seek an internship under the SkillBridge Program described in REF (E) for outside employment aimed at improving the transition of the evaluatee to civilian life if such activity does not interfere with CG mission execution and necessary medical appointments required for the evaluatee's treatment and disability evaluation.*

*h. Notice of Anticipated Separation Date: The Coast Guard (CG PSC-EPM/OPM/RPM in coordination with CG PSC-PSD-med) shall provide an evaluatee with a written separation date upon receipt by CG PSC-PSD-med of a completed MEB report which finds the evaluatee unfit to continue active service.*



*i. Separation Certainty: To provide certainty to the evaluatee with respect to a separation date, the Coast Guard may place the evaluatee in an excess leave status after 270 days have elapsed since the date of initiation of a MEB LAW REF (C).*

*j. Judicious Use of PDES: Each respective command is required to report to CG PSC via CG PSC-PSD any delay of more than 21 days between each stage of PDES for any evaluatee, to include between the MEB, Informal Physical Evaluation Board (IPEB) and Formal Physical Evaluation Board (FPEB). CG PSC shall, no later than 7 days after receipt of a report of delay, take corrective action to ensure the CG exercises maximum discretion to continue the PDES processing of an evaluatee in a timely manner, unless the delay is caused by the evaluatee. Reports of delay shall be sent to:*

*HQS-SMB-CGPSC-PSD-PDESDELAYREPORTING.*

*(1) MEB initiation occurs upon completion of the Medical Board Report Cover Sheet, CG-5684, and concludes upon receipt of the completed Medical Evaluation Board package by CG PSC-PSD-med NLT 30 days thereafter.*

*(2) IPEB initiation occurs upon receipt of a completed MEB package by CG PSC-PSD-med and concludes upon member acceptance or rejection of findings on the Coast Guard Informal Physical Evaluation Board (IPEB) Findings and Recommended Position, Form CGHQ-4808A, NLT 210 days following its initiation.*

*(3) FPEB is optional and initiates upon member rejection of findings on Form CGHQ-4808A and concludes with signature of CG Final Approval Authority within 210 days delineated for IPEB.*

*(4) Transition is conducted by CG PSC-EPM/OPM/RPM and initiates upon signature of CG Final Approval Authority and concludes with issuance of a separation authorization. The Separation/Retirement date should be approximately 30 days from the date of the Separation Authorization.*

*(5) Current case status/timeliness is referenced via Infoview, available at the supporting CG HSWL Clinic.*

*k. Reasonable Delay Request: An evaluatee will be permitted to make a request for reasonable delay in PDES processing in order to obtain additional input and consultation from a medical or legal professional. Any such request for delay shall be approved by the Commandant as delegated to CG PSC, based upon a showing of good cause by the evaluatee.*

*5. These amendments will be included in the next revision of REF (B), which will be released within the next year.*

*6. POCs: For questions regarding Physical Disability Evaluation System policy, contact COMDT (CG-1331) at HQSPolicyandStandards@uscg.mil. For procedural or process questions contact Commander (CG PSC-PSD-med).*

*7. This message will be cancelled on 28 MAR 2024.*

*8. Dr. D. M Navarro, Acting Assistant Commandant for Human Resources (CG-1), sends.*

*9. Internet release is authorized.*

## Appendix B: Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definition
AO	Assignment Officer
CG	U.S. Coast Guard
CG-1	Assistant Commandant for Human Resources
CG-11	Health, Safety & Work Life Directorate
CG-1331	Military Policy Development Division
CGHQ	Coast Guard Headquarters
CG-LMA	Office of Member Advocacy
CG-PSC	Personnel Service Center
CG-PSC-PSD	Personnel Service Center- Personnel Support Division
DES	Disability Evaluation System
DoD	Department of Defense
FPEB	Formal Physical Evaluation Board
IDES	Integrated Disability Evaluations System
IPEB	Informal Physical Evaluation Board
MEB	Medical Evaluation Board
PCM	Primary Care Manager
PDES	Physical Disability Evaluation System
TLD	Temporary Limited Duty
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs