MEMBER CHECKLIST

ENTITLEMENT TO CONTINUATION PAY (CP)

COAST GUARD FINANCIAL READINESS

Congratulations on reaching this important milestone in your Coast Guard career — the point where you are approaching eligibility for Continuation Pay (CP). Use this checklist and accompanying handouts to help reassess your career goals and make important personal financial decisions as they pertain to CP.

HANDOUTS

- Goal-Setting Worksheet
- Spending Plan Worksheet
- Military Consumer Protection
- Servicemembers Civil Relief Act
- Sources of Help for Military Consumers
- Military Retirement
- Entitlement to Continuation Pay (CP)
- Basic Investing

Basic Finance

☐ Update your financial goals and personal spending plan using the *Goal-Setting Worksheet* and the *Spending Plan Worksheet* Handouts. A good spending plan helps you manage your money, plan for your financial goals, and prepare for emergencies. Here are four steps financial experts suggest to get started.

Step 1 — Understand your current situation
In this step, it's important to understand what's REALLY going on with your money today. Start tracking all your income and spending for the next 30 days. How you do the tracking is up to you, but what's important is you do it.

Step 2 — Know where your money should go
Financial experts offer these general guidelines when budgeting your money:

- Try to save and/or invest 10% – 15% of pretax pay.
- Strive to keep transportation expenses including car payments, insurance, gas and maintenance to 15% – 20% of pretax pay.
- Limit housing expenses, including mortgage or rent payment, taxes, utilities, and maintenance to your Basic Allowance for Housing or 25% – 30% or less of pretax pay.

Step 3 — Create a plan
Build a plan for setting aside money and putting limits on how much you'll spend each month per category.

- Prioritize your financial goals with the *Goal-Setting Worksheet* Handout as a guide.
- Establish an emergency fund. Financial experts suggest you should keep at least three to six months of living expenses in reserve. If you do not have that much saved, consider setting aside a little each paycheck to help get you there.

Step 4 — Make adjustments
Update your spending plan as your life changes. Monitor your plan until you have fully adjusted your finances to reflect your new situation.

- ☐ Prepare for possible tax implications of Continuation Pay (CP). The IRS views CP as earned income, therefore, it's taxable. Payment can be split into installments distributed annually to potentially reduce the tax liability incurred by receiving CP as a lump sum. The installments can be spread out up to four years. Each Coast Guard member's situation is unique, so consider speaking with a tax professional.

Additional notes: ____

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Consumer Protection

- ☐ Review the *Military Consumer Protection* Handout for additional information on identity theft, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), and Military Lending Act (MLA).

- ☐ Protect yourself from misleading consumer practices and know basic procedures for handling a consumer complaint or dispute. Review the *Sources of Help for Military Consumers* Handout.

Additional notes: ____

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Planning for the Future

☐ Understand the basics of the Blended Retirement System by reviewing the *Military Retirement* Handout.

- The Blended Retirement System, or BRS, blends the traditional legacy retirement pension (defined benefit) with contributions to a member's Thrift Savings Plan account (defined contribution).
- The TSP is similar to the retirement plans offered by many private employers as it offers similar types of savings and tax benefits. It is also the same defined contribution plan thousands of Service members and federal government civilians take advantage of for their retirement savings.
- CP is a one-time, midcareer payout offered to eligible Coast Guard members who are covered under the BRS in exchange for additional service. CP is in addition to any other career field-specific incentives or retention bonuses.

☐ Know more about CP. Review the *Entitlement to Continuation Pay (CP)* Handout for more information.

- You must elect to receive CP before starting your 12th year of service (calculated from a Coast Guard member's Pay Entry Base Date).
- CP is targeted at the midcareer mark.
- Most Coast Guard members in BRS who reach the 12-year mark will be eligible to request CP. However, each Service determines the timing and the amount.
- Please note, any unearned portion of the CP will be subject to repayment if you do not complete your continued service obligation.

☐ Calculate how much CP you will receive. Refer to the *Entitlement to Continuation Pay (CP)* Handout provided and use the pay rates to help you determine the amount of money you will potentially receive.

- Active Duty Coast Guard members, including full-time support (FTS) personnel, may be eligible for a CP multiplier of 2.5 up to 13 times one month's basic pay.*
- Members of the Reserves in drilling status may be eligible to receive a CP multiplier of 0.5 up to six times one month's basic pay.*
- Each Service will determine and publish its own guidance on CP every calendar year. Pay rate multipliers may be based on Service-specific retention needs, specialty skills and hard-to-fill positions.*
- Please note that your CP payout is subject to a tax withholding rate. Keep in mind this will lower your net payment received.

**Subject to change*

☐ Put CP to good use. Review the *Entitlement to Continuation Pay (CP)* Handout for more information.

Additional notes: ______________________________

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Saving and Investing

☐ Evaluate your retirement goals and review TSP annual contribution limits.

Important note: You should keep the IRS annual contribution limit in mind when deciding how much you will contribute to your TSP account from your CP. Exceeding the IRS limit early could result in your monthly auto payments into your TSP account to stop before December, causing you to lose out on government matching contributions. Review the *Military Retirement* Handout for more information on TSP matching contributions.

☐ Review the *Basic Investing* Handout to learn more about investing for retirement, compound earnings and fundamentals of investing.

Additional notes: ______________________________

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Resources

☐ Ask for help. You don't have to navigate financial decisions regarding CP alone. Help is just a visit, call, click or download away.

- **Visit** a PFM at your local Health, Safety and Work-Life (HSWL) Regional Practice who can help you find answers to questions about money management, debt, saving and investing.
- **Call** CG SUPRT for free and confidential consultation with a Money Coach.
- **Download** the Coast Guard Work-Life and DoD FINRED Sen$e mobile apps to stay connected and find the latest news on CP rates.

Additional notes: ______________________________

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CFS/PFM Printed Name *Member Printed Name*

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Signature *Date* *Signature* *Date*