

§ 1.401(a)-12

26 CFR Ch. I (4-1-04 Edition)

§ 1.401(a)-12 Mergers and consolidations of plans and transfers of plan assets.

A trust will not be qualified under section 401 unless the plan of which the trust is a part provides that in the case of any merger or consolidation with, or transfer of assets or liabilities to, another plan after September 2, 1974, each participant in the plan would receive a minimum benefit if the plan terminated immediately after the merger, consolidation, or transfer. This benefit must be equal to or greater than the benefit the participant would have been entitled to receive immediately before the merger, consolidation, or transfer if the plan in which he was a participant had then terminated. This section applies to a multiemployer plan only to the extent determined by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. For additional rules concerning mergers or consolidations of plans and transfers of plan assets, see section 414(l) and § 1.414(l)-1.

[T.D. 7638, 44 FR 48195, Aug. 17, 1979]

§ 1.401(a)-13 Assignment or alienation of benefits.

(a) *Scope of the regulations.* This section applies only to plans to which section 411 applies without regard to section 411(e)(2). Thus, for example, it does not apply to a governmental plan, within the meaning of section 414(d); a church plan, within the meaning of section 414(e), for which there has not been made the election under section 410(a) to have the participation, vesting, funding, etc. requirements apply; or a plan which at no time after September 2, 1974, provided for employer contributions.

(b) *No assignment or alienation—(1) General rule.* Under section 401(a)(13), a trust will not be qualified unless the plan of which the trust is a part provides that benefits provided under the plan may not be anticipated, assigned (either at law or in equity), alienated or subject to attachment, garnishment, levy, execution or other legal or equitable process.

(2) *Federal tax levies and judgments.* A plan provision satisfying the requirements of subparagraph (1) of this paragraph shall not preclude the following:

(i) The enforcement of a Federal tax levy made pursuant to section 6331.

(ii) The collection by the United States on a judgment resulting from an unpaid tax assessment.

(c) *Definition of assignment and alienation—(1) In general.* For purposes of this section, the terms “assignment” and “alienation” include—

(i) Any arrangement providing for the payment to the employer of plan benefits which otherwise would be due the participant under the plan, and

(ii) Any direct or indirect arrangement (whether revocable or irrevocable) whereby a party acquires from a participant or beneficiary a right or interest enforceable against the plan in, or to, all or any part of a plan benefit payment which is, or may become, payable to the participant or beneficiary.

(2) *Specific arrangements not considered an assignment or alienation.* The terms “assignment” and “alienation” do not include, and paragraph (e) of this section does not apply to, the following arrangements:

(i) Any arrangement for the recovery of amounts described in section 4045(b) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, 88 Stat. 1027 (relating to the recapture of certain payments),

(ii) Any arrangement for the withholding of Federal, State or local tax from plan benefit payments,

(iii) Any arrangement for the recovery by the plan of overpayments of benefits previously made to a participant,

(iv) Any arrangement for the transfer of benefit rights from the plan to another plan, or

(v) Any arrangement for the direct deposit of benefit payments to an account in a bank, savings and loan association or credit union, provided such arrangement is not part of an arrangement constituting an assignment or alienation. Thus, for example, such an arrangement could provide for the direct deposit of a participant's benefit payments to a bank account held by the participant and the participant's spouse as joint tenants.

(d) *Exceptions to general rule prohibiting assignments or alienations—(1) Certain voluntary and revocable assignments*

or alienations. Notwithstanding paragraph (b)(1) of this section, a plan may provide that once a participant or beneficiary begins receiving benefits under the plan, the participant or beneficiary may assign or alienate the right to future benefit payments provided that the provision is limited to assignments or alienations which—

- (i) Are voluntary and revocable;
- (ii) Do not in the aggregate exceed 10 percent of any benefit payment; and
- (iii) Are neither for the purpose, nor have the effect, of defraying plan administration costs.

For purposes of this subparagraph, an attachment, garnishment, levy, execution, or other legal or equitable process is not considered a voluntary assignment or alienation.

(2) *Benefits assigned or alienated as security for loans.* (i) Notwithstanding paragraph (b)(1) of this section, a plan may provide for loans from the plan to a participant or a beneficiary to be secured (by whatever means) by the participant's accrued nonforfeitable benefit provided that the following conditions are met.

(ii) The plan provision providing for the loans must be limited to loans from the plan. A plan may not provide for the use of benefits accrued or to be accrued under the plan as security for a loan from a party other than the plan, regardless of whether these benefits are nonforfeitable within the meaning of section 411 and the regulations thereunder.

(iii) The loan, if made to a participant or beneficiary who is a disqualified person (within the meaning of section 4975(e)(2)), must be exempt from the tax imposed by section 4975 (relating to the tax imposed on prohibited transactions) by reason of section 4975(d)(1). If the loan is made to a participant or beneficiary who is not a disqualified person, the loan must be one which would be exempt from the tax imposed by section 4975 by reason of section 4975(d)(1) if the loan were made to a disqualified person.

(e) *Special rule for certain arrangements—*(1) *In general.* For purposes of this section and notwithstanding paragraph (c)(1) of this section, an arrangement whereby a participant or beneficiary directs the plan to pay all, or

any portion, of a plan benefit payment to a third party (which includes the participant's employer) will not constitute an "assignment or alienation" if—

- (i) It is revocable at any time by the participant or beneficiary; and
- (ii) The third party files a written acknowledgement with the plan administrator pursuant to subparagraph (2) of this paragraph.

(2) *Acknowledgement requirement for third party arrangements.* In accordance with paragraph (e)(1)(ii) of this section, the third party is required to file a written acknowledgement with the plan administrator. This acknowledgement must state that the third party has no enforceable right in, or to, any plan benefit payment or portion thereof (except to the extent of payments actually received pursuant to the terms of the arrangement). A blanket written acknowledgement for all participants and beneficiaries who are covered under the arrangement with the third party is sufficient. The written acknowledgement must be filed with the plan administrator no later than the later of—

- (i) August 18, 1978; or
- (ii) 90 days after the arrangement is entered into.

(f) *Effective date.* Section 401(a)(13) is applicable as of January 1, 1976, and the plan provision required by this section must be effective as of that date. However, regardless of when the provision is adopted, it will not affect—

(1) Attachments, garnishments, levies, or other legal or equitable process permitted under the plan that are made before January 1, 1976;

(2) Assignments permitted under the plan that are irrevocable on December 31, 1975, including assignments made before January 1, 1976, as security for loans to a participant or beneficiary from a party other than the plan; and

(3) Renewals or extensions of loans described in subparagraph (2) of this paragraph, if—

- (i) The principal amount of the obligation outstanding on December 31, 1975 (or, if less, the principal amount outstanding on the date of renewal or extension), is not increased;

(ii) The loan, as renewed or extended, does not bear a rate of interest in excess of the rate prevailing for similar loans at the time of the renewal or extensions; and

(iii) With respect to loans that are renewed or extended to bear a variable interest rate, the formula for determining the applicable rate is consistent with the formula for formulae prevailing for similar loans at the time of the renewal or extension. For purposes of subparagraphs (2) and (3) of this paragraph, a loan from a party other than the plan made after December 31, 1975, will be treated as a new loan. This is so even if the lender's security interest for the loan arises from an assignment of the participant's accrued nonforfeitable benefit made before that date.

(g) *Special rules for qualified domestic relations orders*—(1) *Definition.* The term “qualified domestic relations order” (QDRO) has the meaning set forth in section 414(p). For purposes of the Internal Revenue Code, a QDRO also includes any domestic relations order described in section 303(d) of the Retirement Equity Act of 1984.

(2) *Plan amendments.* A plan will not fail to satisfy the qualification requirements of section 401(a) or 403(a) merely because it does not include provisions with regard to a QDRO.

(3) *Waiver of distribution requirements.* A plan shall not be treated as failing to satisfy the requirements of sections 401(a) and (k) and 409(d) solely because of a payment to an alternate payee pursuant to a QDRO. This is the case even if the plan provides for payments pursuant to a QDRO to an alternate payee prior to the time it may make payments to a participant. Thus, for example, a pension plan may pay an alternate payee even though the participant may not receive a distribution because he continues to be employed by the employer.

(4) *Coordination with section 417*—(i) *Former spouse.* (A) *In general.* Under section 414(p)(5), a QDRO may provide that a former spouse shall be treated as the current spouse of a participant for all or some purposes under sections 401(a)(11) and 417.

(B) *Consent.* (1) To the extent a former spouse is treated as the current

spouse of the participant by reason of a QDRO, any current spouse shall not be treated as the current spouse. For example, assume H is divorced from W, but a QDRO provides that H shall be treated as W's current spouse with respect to all of W's benefits under a plan. H will be treated as the surviving spouse under the QPSA and QJSA unless W obtains H's consent to waive the QPSA or QJSA or both. The fact that W married S after W's divorce from H is disregarded. If, however, the QDRO had provided that H shall be treated as W's current spouse only with respect to benefits that accrued prior to the divorce, then H's consent would be needed by W to waive the QPSA or QJSA with respect to benefits accrued before the divorce. S's consent would be required with respect to the remainder of the benefits.

(2) In the preceding examples, if the QDRO ordered that a portion of W's benefit (either through separate accounts or a percentage of the benefit) must be distributed to H rather than ordering that H be treated as W's spouse, the survivor annuity requirements of sections 401(a)(11) and 417 would not apply to the part of W's benefit awarded H. Instead, the terms of the QDRO would determine how H's portion of W's accrued benefit is paid. W is required to obtain S's consent if W elects to waive either the QJSA or QPSA with respect to the remaining portion of W's benefit.

(C) *Amount of the QPSA or QJSA.* (1) Where, because of a QDRO, more than one individual is to be treated as the surviving spouse, a plan may provide that the total amount to be paid in the form of a QPSA or survivor portion of a QJSA may not exceed the amount that would be paid if there were only one surviving spouse. The QPSA or survivor portion of the QJSA, as the case may be, payable to each surviving spouse must be paid as an annuity based on the life of each such spouse.

(2) Where the QDRO splits the participant's accrued benefit between the participant and a former spouse (either through separate accounts or percentage of the benefit), the surviving spouse of the participant is entitled to a QPSA or QJSA based on the participant's accrued benefit as of the date of

death or the annuity starting date, less the separate account or percentage that is payable to the former spouse. The calculation is made as if the separate account or percentage had been distributed to the participant prior to the relevant date.

(ii) *Current spouse.* Under section 414(p)(5), even if the applicable election periods (*i.e.*, the first day of the year in which the participant attains age 35 and 90 days before the annuity starting date) have not begun, a QDRO may provide that a current spouse shall not be treated as the current spouse of the participant for all or some purposes under sections 401(a)(11) and 417. A QDRO may provide that the current spouse waives all future rights to a QPSA or QJSA.

(iii) *Effects on benefits.* (A) A plan is not required to provide additional vesting or benefits because of a QDRO.

(B) If an alternate payee is treated pursuant to a QDRO as having an interest in the plan benefit, including a separate account or percentage of the participant's account, then the QDRO cannot provide the alternate payee with a greater right to designate a beneficiary for the alternate payee's benefit amount than the participant's right. The QJSA or QPSA provisions of section 417 do not apply to the spouse of an alternate payee.

(C) If the former spouse who is treated as a current spouse dies prior to the participant's annuity starting date, then any actual current spouse of the participant is treated as the current spouse, except as otherwise provided in a QDRO.

(iv) *Section 415 requirements.* Even though a participant's benefits are awarded to an alternate payee pursuant to a QDRO, the benefits are benefits of the participant for purposes of applying the limitations of section 415 to the participant's benefits.

[T.D. 7534, 43 FR 6943, Feb. 17, 1978, as amended by T.D. 8219, 53 FR 31850, Aug. 22, 1988; 53 FR 48534, Dec. 1, 1988]

§ 1.401(a)-14 Commencement of benefits under qualified trusts.

(a) *In general.* Under section 401(a)(14), a trust to which section 411 applies (without regard to section 411(e)(2)) is not qualified under section

401 unless the plan of which such trust is a part provides that the payment of benefits under the plan to the participant will begin not later than the 60th day after the close of the plan year in which the latest of the following events occurs—

(1) The attainment by the participant of age 65, or, if earlier, the normal retirement age specified under the plan,

(2) The 10th anniversary of the date on which the participant commenced participation in the plan,

(3) The termination of the participant's service with the employer, or

(4) The date specified in an election made pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section.

Notwithstanding the preceding sentence, a plan may require that a participant file a claim for benefits before payment of benefits will commence.

(b) *Election of later date—(1) General rule.* A plan may permit a participant to elect that the payment to him of any benefit under a plan will commence at a date later than the dates specified under paragraphs (a)(1), (2), and (3) of this section.

(2) *Manner of election.* A plan permitting an election under this paragraph shall require that such election must be made by submitting to the plan administrator a written statement, signed by the participant, which describes the benefit and the date on which the payment of such benefit shall commence.

(3) *Restriction.* An election may not be made pursuant to a plan provision permitted by this paragraph if the exercise of such election will cause benefits payable under the plan with respect to the participant in the event of his death to be more than "incidental" within the meaning of paragraph (b)(1)(i) of §1.401-1.

(c) *Special early retirement rule—(1) Separation prior to early retirement age.* A trust forming part of a plan which provides for the payment of an early retirement benefit is not qualified under section 401 unless, upon satisfaction of the age requirement for such early retirement benefit, a participant who—

(i) Satisfied the service requirements for such early retirement benefit, but