

Example 4. (i) Employer *X* employs a class of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and participating in multiemployer group health plan *M*. As required by the collective bargaining agreement, *X* has been making contributions to *M*. *X* experiences financial difficulties and is forced into bankruptcy by its creditors. *X* continues to employ all of the employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement. *X* also continues to make contributions to *M* until the current collective bargaining agreement expires, on June 30, 2001, and then *X* stops making contributions to *M*. *X*'s employees (and their spouses and dependent children) lose coverage under *M* effective July 1, 2001. *X* does not enter into another collective bargaining agreement covering the class of employees covered by the expired collective bargaining agreement. Effective September 1, 2001, *X* establishes a group health plan covering the class of employees formerly covered by the collective bargaining agreement. The group health plan also covers their spouses and dependent children.

(ii) Under these facts, *M* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available from July 1, 2001 until August 31, 2001, and the group health plan established by *X* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available from September 1, 2001 until the obligation ends (see Q&A-1 of § 54.4980B-7) to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *X*. The loss of coverage under *M* for those employees of *X* who continue in employment (and the loss of coverage for their spouses and dependent children) does not constitute a qualifying event.

Example 5. (i) Employer *W* employs a class of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and participating in multiemployer group health plan *M*. As required by the collective bargaining agreement, *W* has been making contributions to *M*. The employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement vote to decertify their current employee representative effective January 1, 2002 and vote to certify a new employee representative effective the same date. As a consequence, on January 1, 2002 they cease to be covered under *M* and commence to be covered under multiemployer group health plan *N*.

(ii) Effective January 1, 2002, *N* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *W*.

The loss of coverage under *M* for those employees of *W* who continue in employment (and the loss of coverage for their spouses and dependent children) does not constitute a qualifying event.

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§ 54.4980B-10 Interaction of FMLA and COBRA.

The following questions-and-answers address how the taking of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) (29 U.S.C. 2601-2619) affects the COBRA continuation coverage requirements:

Q-1: In what circumstances does a qualifying event occur if an employee does not return from leave taken under FMLA?

A-1: (a) The taking of leave under FMLA does not constitute a qualifying event. A qualifying event under Q&A-1 of § 54.4980B-4 occurs, however, if—

(1) An employee (or the spouse or a dependent child of the employee) is covered on the day before the first day of FMLA leave (or becomes covered during the FMLA leave) under a group health plan of the employee's employer;

(2) The employee does not return to employment with the employer at the end of the FMLA leave; and

(3) The employee (or the spouse or a dependent child of the employee) would, in the absence of COBRA continuation coverage, lose coverage under the group health plan before the end of the maximum coverage period.

(b) However, the satisfaction of the three conditions in paragraph (a) of this Q&A-1 does not constitute a qualifying event if the employer eliminates, on or before the last day of the employee's FMLA leave, coverage under a group health plan for the class of employees (while continuing to employ that class of employees) to which the employee would have belonged if the employee had not taken FMLA leave.

Q-2: If a qualifying event described in Q&A-1 of this section occurs, when does it occur, and how is the maximum coverage period measured?

A-2: A qualifying event described in Q&A-1 of this section occurs on the last day of FMLA leave. (The determination of when FMLA leave ends is

not made under the rules of this section. See the FMLA regulations, 29 CFR Part 825 (§§ 825.100-825.800.) The maximum coverage period (see Q&A-4 of § 54.4980B-7) is measured from the date of the qualifying event (that is, the last day of FMLA leave). If, however, coverage under the group health plan is lost at a later date and the plan provides for the extension of the required periods (see paragraph (b) of Q&A-4 of § 54.4980B-7), then the maximum coverage period is measured from the date when coverage is lost. The rules of this Q&A-2 are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Employee *B* is covered under the group health plan of Employer *X* on January 31, 2001. *B* takes FMLA leave beginning February 1, 2001. *B*'s last day of FMLA leave is 12 weeks later, on April 25, 2001, and *B* does not return to work with *X* at the end of the FMLA leave. If *B* does not elect COBRA continuation coverage, *B* will not be covered under the group health plan of *X* as of April 26, 2001.

(ii) *B* experiences a qualifying event on April 25, 2001, and the maximum coverage period is measured from that date. (This is the case even if, for part or all of the FMLA leave, *B* fails to pay the employee portion of premiums for coverage under the group health plan of *X* and is not covered under *X*'s plan. See Q&A-3 of this section.)

Example 2. (i) Employee *C* and *C*'s spouse are covered under the group health plan of Employer *Y* on August 15, 2001. *C* takes FMLA leave beginning August 16, 2001. *C* informs *Y* less than 12 weeks later, on September 28, 2001, that *C* will not be returning to work. Under the FMLA regulations, 29 CFR Part 825 (§§ 825.100-825.800), *C*'s last day of FMLA leave is September 28, 2001. *C* does not return to work with *Y* at the end of the FMLA leave. If *C* and *C*'s spouse do not elect COBRA continuation coverage, they will not be covered under the group health plan of *Y* as of September 29, 2001.

(ii) *C* and *C*'s spouse experience a qualifying event on September 28, 2001, and the maximum coverage period (generally 18 months) is measured from that date. (This is the case even if, for part or all of the FMLA leave, *C* fails to pay the employee portion of premiums for coverage under the group health plan of *Y* and *C* or *C*'s spouse is not covered under *Y*'s plan. See Q&A-3 of this section.)

Q-3: If an employee fails to pay the employee portion of premiums for coverage under a group health plan during FMLA leave or declines coverage under a group health plan during FMLA

leave, does this affect the determination of whether or when the employee has experienced a qualifying event?

A-3: No. Any lapse of coverage under a group health plan during FMLA leave is irrelevant in determining whether a set of circumstances constitutes a qualifying event under Q&A-1 of this section or when such a qualifying event occurs under Q&A-2 of this section.

Q-4: Is the application of the rules in Q&A-1 through Q&A-3 of this section affected by a requirement of state or local law to provide a period of coverage longer than that required under FMLA?

A-4: No. Any state or local law that requires coverage under a group health plan to be maintained during a leave of absence for a period longer than that required under FMLA (for example, for 16 weeks of leave rather than for the 12 weeks required under FMLA) is disregarded for purposes of determining when a qualifying event occurs under Q&A-1 through Q&A-3 of this section.

Q-5: May COBRA continuation coverage be conditioned upon reimbursement of the premiums paid by the employer for coverage under a group health plan during FMLA leave?

A-5: No. The U.S. Department of Labor has published rules describing the circumstances in which an employer may recover premiums it pays to maintain coverage, including family coverage, under a group health plan during FMLA leave from an employee who fails to return from leave. See 29 CFR 825.213. Even if recovery of premiums is permitted under 29 CFR 825.213, the right to COBRA continuation coverage cannot be conditioned upon the employee's reimbursement of the employer for premiums the employer paid to maintain coverage under a group health plan during FMLA leave.

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§ 54.4980F-1 Notice requirements for certain pension plan amendments significantly reducing the rate of future benefit accrual.

The following questions and answers concern the notification requirements imposed by 4980F of the Internal Revenue Code and section 204(h) of ERISA