



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

Aviation Safety

Office of Aerospace Medicine  
800 Independence Ave  
Washington, DC 20591

September 8, 2020

Dear HIMS Program Supporters,

This has been a year of incredible change, mostly not of our own choosing. Enclosed are three policy and guidance updates I want to share with you:

HIMS Step Down Plan

HIMS Step Down Plan Implementation

Guidance for HIMS Airmen on Furlough/Extended Leave from the Airlines

Certainly, we have not covered all the possible scenarios, but hopefully you will find the 90% solution in these documents. We have worked with our staff, psychiatry consultants, AME consultants, and the HIMS Chairs in developing them. As always, if you have further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Finally, for those who have not heard, Dr. Mike Berry will be retiring from the FAA on September 30, 2020. I cannot begin to describe the void his departure will create, but those of us who remain are committed to maintaining our program as the gold standard for the world. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

**PENNY M  
GIOVANETTI**

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Penny M. Giovanetti, D.O.  
Director, Medical Specialties Division

3 Enclosures



# Federal Aviation Administration

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## Memorandum

Date: August 17, 2020 (revised testing verbiage September 8, 2020)  
To: AAM-200, AMCD, Regional Flight Surgeons  
From: Penny M. Giovanetti, D.O. Director, Medical Specialties Division, AAM-200  
Subject: HIMS Step Down Plan

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On April 1, 2020, the NTSB accepted an FAA proposal which met safety recommendation A-07-43, and extended follow up for airmen with a diagnosis of substance dependence. Subsequent to that decision, AAM reevaluated the minimum requirements of the HIMS recovery program, in consultation with the airline HIMS chairs and addiction psychiatry consultants. Note that the time course below is nominal and indicates usual, uncomplicated progression of recovery but may be modified on a case-by-case basis. The testing frequencies listed are minimums and may be increased at the discretion of the HIMS AME.

Effective immediately:

Permanent abstinence from mind and mood altering substances is expected for the duration of the flying career.

Initial phase (Year 1, beginning with initial special issuance)

- Aftercare weekly for 1 year
- HIMS psychiatrist/addictions specialist one visit at end of year 1
- Random testing 14 screens in 12 mos and/or mobile alcohol testing e.g. Soberlink
- Attendance at peer support group e.g. AA twice weekly
- Chief pilot/management assessment monthly
- Peer pilot assessment monthly
- HIMS AME of record every 3 months (half the visits may be virtual)

Early phase (Years 2-4)

- Random testing 14 screens in 12 mos and/or mobile alcohol testing e.g. Soberlink
- Attendance at peer support group e.g. AA twice weekly
- Chief pilot/management assessment monthly
- Peer pilot assessment monthly
- HIMS AME of record every 3 months (half the visits may be virtual)

Advanced phase (Years 5-7)

Random PEth testing (plus drug screens if indicated) 4 times in 12 months

Attendance at peer support group e.g. AA weekly

HIMS AME of record every 6 months

Maintenance phase (Year 7 on) –

HIMS AME of airman's choice at each exam



# Federal Aviation Administration

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## Memorandum

Date: September 8, 2020

To: AAM-200, AMCD, Regional Flight Surgeons, HIMS AMEs

From: Penny M. Giovanetti, D.O. Director, Medical Specialties Division,  
AAM-200

Subject: HIMS Step Down Plan Implementation

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This document provides administrative guidance for the implementation and transition to use of the HIMS Step Down Plan (attached). **Note: The Authorization Letter, not the Step Down Plan, is the binding document for the special issuance.**

- 1) There are no changes to the initial special issuance process.
- 2) All changes to Authorization Letters must be requested by the HIMS AME and approved by the FAA (Drug & Alcohol Team at AMCD).
- 3) Progression through the Step Down Plan is not automatic.
- 4) The HIMS AME should continue to follow up and issue 6-month time limited certificates in accordance with the existing Authorization Letter until a new letter is received.
- 5) Requests for “early” Step Down will not be considered.
- 6) During transition, HIMS AMEs may immediately request a new Authorization Letter to align with Step Down phases for pilots who are one to four years past their initial special issuance. Requests for new Authorization Letters for pilots more than four years past initial special issuance should be accomplished at the next routine visit.
- 7) During transition, AMCD may request an additional worksheet be completed by the HIMS AME to facilitate review for the new Authorization Letter.



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## Memorandum

Date: September 8, 2020

To: AAM-200, AMCD, Regional Flight Surgeons, HIMS AMEs

From: Penny M. Giovanetti, D.O. Director, Medical Specialties Division, AAM-200

Subject: Guidance for HIMS Airmen on Furlough/Extended Leave from the Airlines

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Ideally, furloughed pilots would continue their recovery programs unchanged. FAA recognizes the stress of being furloughed both increases the risk of relapse and may financially limit recovery activities. The following guidance is provided to help airmen make decisions which are best for them.

Option 1 – Pilots who choose to keep their Class 1 or 2 medical certificate current, must follow all the provisions in their existing authorization letter, except those which depend on the airline, such as Chief Pilot letter, group meetings, etc. Pilots who secure other commercial flying employment should work with their HIMS AME to determine what employer documentation is reasonable to obtain. New time limited certificates and authorization letters should be issued as usual.

Option 2 – Pilots who allow their time limited medical certificate to expire should continue with participation in peer support groups e.g. AA, Birds, and continue to work with their sponsor. Annual visits with HIMS AME of record is encouraged. Special issuance authorizations will not be withdrawn. Those pilots may reenter the HIMS program by reengaging with their HIMS AME of record who will assess their recovery, reinstitute testing, request additional evaluations, if indicated, and recommend to AMCD the most appropriate phase of reinstatement. In order to expedite return to flying, the HIMS AME may issue a new 6-month time limited certificate once he/she determines the pilot is in satisfactory recovery and is otherwise qualified. The HIMS AME must then submit appropriate documentation to AMCD for concurrence and a new authorization letter.