



# Policies Governing the Consideration of Requests for Exceptions to Policy

**Purpose.** The policies governing NCCPA board certification and other credentialing programs exist to protect the integrity of the board certification and credentialing process. Policies are thoughtfully developed and fairly applied. Nevertheless, recognizing that severe extenuating circumstances can sometimes preclude compliance with certain NCCPA requirements, NCCPA affords PAs in such circumstances the opportunity to submit Exception to Policy (“ETP”) requests.

**Submission Criteria.** To be considered, ETP requests must meet all applicable submission criteria as published on NCCPA’s website. Submission criteria address documentation requirements and timeliness.

**Other Limitations.** As detailed below, certain NCCPA policies are outside the scope of the ETP review process, and requests for exceptions to those policies will not be considered. Further, NCCPA will not grant ETP requests if the requested exception poses a risk to the public, jeopardizes the integrity of NCCPA exams, is inconsistent with NCCPA’s mission, or if granting the request would subject NCCPA to unreasonable expense and burden.

The ETP process is not the means through which PAs should seek remedy for incidents occurring during the administration of an exam. Such exam-related grievances must be submitted in accordance with procedures published on NCCPA’s website.

**Communication Requirements.** NCCPA communicates directly with PAs and, if applicable, their legal counsel. With a written, signed, and notarized request or pursuant to a properly scoped Power of Attorney or legal guardianship document, a PA can authorize a non-attorney representative to communicate with NCCPA on the PA’s behalf. In the absence of a Power of Attorney or legal guardianship, the PA’s signed and notarized request to appoint a non-attorney representative must present extenuating circumstances that warrant departure from NCCPA’s rule requiring the PA himself or herself to communicate with NCCPA.

**Guidance to Those Seeking an Exception to Policy.** NCCPA reviews requests for Exception to Policy (“ETP”) that pertain to a PA’s inability to comply with an NCCPA board certification requirement within the specified timeframe due to severe, extenuating circumstances as set forth in this policy, except for requests that relate to the PANRE-LA examination. ETP requests that pertain to the PANRE-LA examination are governed by the published PANRE-LA Operational Policies, Procedures and Authorization.

Examples of board certification requirements include:

- Taking an NCCPA exam within the required time period
- Earning CME credits
- Logging CME credits
- Submitting required fees
- Complying with a CME Audit
- Meeting other administrative requirements

***Extenuating Circumstances That May Qualify for an Exception to Policy:***

**Examples** of extenuating circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

- Personal medical issues (the only qualifying circumstance for some PANRE-LA exam ETP requests)
- Family medical issues
- A death in the family
- Legal or personal issues
- Inclement weather
- Military deployment outside of the United States
- Technical difficulties related to NCCPA system issues
- NCCPA error
- Natural Disaster
- Becoming a new parent through the birth or adoptive placement of a child within three months prior to the deadline for meeting an NCCPA requirement.

The existence of an extenuating circumstance will not automatically result in the grant of an exception to an NCCPA policy. NCCPA will consider the severity and, if applicable, duration of the extenuating circumstance, as well as how it affected the PA's ability to comply with NCCPA policy requirements.

A circumstance that prevents a PA who is registered for PANRE-LA from participating in a quarter of PANRE-LA will not qualify for an exception to policy unless the exception to policy request relates to the PA's own personal medical extenuating circumstances and participation in that quarter of PANRE-LA is required for the PA to remain enrolled in PANRE-LA or to complete eight exam assessment quarters.

***Circumstances That Do Not Qualify for an Exception to Policy***

Circumstances that do not qualify for an exception to policy include, but are not limited to:

- Any circumstance previously considered by NCCPA for a prior exception, except for new information relating to continuing or worsening circumstances that occurred after NCCPA's consideration of the prior ETP request.
- Financial hardship unless related to a qualifying extenuating circumstance.
- Not receiving NCCPA correspondence due to the PA's failure to timely notify NCCPA of a name, email, address change, or failing to list NCCPA as a trusted sender on the PA's email account.
- Forgetting to complete requirements by required timeframe.
- Relying on an employer or person other than the PA to submit requirements by the required by the required timeframe.
- Going on vacation or traveling to other areas where the internet may be limited or unavailable.
- Normal life events (working, moving, getting married, raising children, getting divorced, etc.), in the absence of other qualifying extenuating circumstances.
- Becoming a new parent through the birth or adoptive placement of a child that occurs more than three months prior to the deadline for meeting an NCCPA requirement, in the absence of other qualifying extenuating circumstances.
- Having an ill relative for whom the PA does not serve as a primary or secondary caregiver.
- Volunteering, nearing retirement, or having maintained board certification for many years.

- Technical difficulties related to a PA's system or user error (e.g., internet connection, outdated browser, forgotten username or password)
- Exemption from a CME audit due to retirement, if NCCPA was not notified of the PA's retirement date.
- Prioritizing other voluntary commitments, such as pursuing non-PA career or educational programs, over meeting NCCPA requirements.

**Board Certification Requirements for which ETP Requests May Be Considered:**

**Examples** of NCCPA requirements for which a PA may submit an ETP request include:

1. General Requests

- Fee waivers or refunds (Exam fee refunds may exclude the non-refundable fees associated with reserving your seat).
- 90-day wait between attempts at PANCE or PANRE.
- Inability to take PANCE during the required timeframes (Extension of initial eligibility – Exhaustion of six (6) years and/or six (6) attempts)
- Inability to take PANRE during the required timeframes (Extension of timeframe to recertify – 6<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> year)
- Inability to pass PANCE, PANRE or a CAQ maintenance exam during the required timeframe due to an extenuating circumstance.
- Filing an exam grievance outside of the required three (3) business day timeframe (qualifies for ETP review **ONLY** when an extenuating circumstance prevented compliance with the three (3) business day grievance policy).
- Inability to earn or to log CME credits during the required timeframes (Extension of timeframe for current cycle).
- Requests for extension of CME audit timeframes.
- Inability to apply for PANRE-LA during the required timeframe due to an extenuating circumstance (considered under this policy and the published PANRE-LA Operational Policies, Procedures and Authorization).
- Inability to complete the required minimum number of quarters (either during an exam administration year or in total) during the administration of the PANRE-LA exam due to an extenuating personal medical issue (considered under the published PANRE-LA Operational Policies, Procedures and Authorization).

PAs must pay careful attention to preparing for and scheduling an NCCPA exam within the policy deadlines. **Requests for additional exam attempts above and beyond the standards communicated in the PANCE and PANRE policies are approved only in rare circumstances.** A request for an extension of time in which to take an NCCPA exam will not be granted in the absence of extenuating circumstances simply because a PA has not used all the PA's maximum exam attempts within the required timeframe or because the PA cannot schedule remaining exam attempts in the final year of eligibility due to the 90-day waiting period for PANCE or PANRE, or because the PA's CAQ will expire before the next CAQ exam administration window.

2. Special Testing Accommodation Requests

Requests for a special testing accommodation due to a disability must be submitted to NCCPA's special testing accommodations department for consideration. More information on submitting requests for a special testing accommodation and applicable

forms can be found at: <http://www.nccpa.net/Forms>. PAs may request a review by NCCPA's Review Committee when a request for special testing accommodations has been denied. Submittal of an associated fee is required. See the *Review and Appeal Policies and Procedures* for information regarding filing a request for review.

### **Non-Eligible ETP Requests**

#### 1. Violation of NCCPA Standards

NCCPA will not grant ETP requests if the requested exception poses a risk to the public, jeopardizes the integrity of NCCPA exams (e.g., requests to take PANRE, PANCE, or CAQ exams via open-book or outside of a testing center), is inconsistent with NCCPA's mission, does not meet documentation requirements, relates to a policy ineligible for review, or if granting the request would subject NCCPA to unreasonable expense and burden (e.g., requests for NCCPA to develop a different style of exam or to increase the number of CAQ exam administrations, where NCCPA has not developed sufficient test items for multiple administrations). In addition, NCCPA may reject a PA's ETP request that is based on the PA's preference (e.g., a request to log CME by paper rather than electronically) or with which the PA can comply but seeks to avoid due to inconvenience or cost (e.g., traveling to a Pearson VUE exam site).

#### 2. Policy Changes

NCCPA does not entertain ETP requests that seek a change in NCCPA's policies. Examples of policy change requests for which an ETP will not be considered include:

- Requests for exception to the eligibility requirement of graduation from ARC-accredited PA program or other certification, CAQ, or PA-C Emeritus eligibility requirements.
- Requests to lower the passing score for an exam.
- Requests for a PANCE, PANRE, CAQ, or PANRE-LA exam that excludes certain subject areas or that otherwise alters the content of the exam.
- Requests to take PANCE or PANRE outside of a testing facility or open book.
- Requests for release of proprietary exam information.
- Requests for permission to use the PA-C credential limited to non-clinical practice, where the PA otherwise would not be eligible for the PA-C (usually due to disciplinary action).
- Requests that NCCPA accept non-qualifying CME credits or CME credits earned outside the required timeframe.
- Requests to be placed in a different board certification maintenance cycle or recertification cycle.
- Requests to waive the requirement to take an examination or earn CME credits.
- Other requests for inconsistent application of NCCPA policies that are unrelated to a PA's inability to comply with requirements due to extenuating circumstances (e.g., changes or exceptions to Code of Conduct, Information Disclosure Policy, etc.)
- Requests to waive any CAQ requirements (e.g., to take a CAQ exam at an alternative time or location).
- Requests to waive PA-C Emeritus requirements (e.g., to seek PA-C Emeritus without satisfying the disability, age and/or length of board certification requirements).

- Requests to waive eligibility and participation requirements for the PANRE-LA exam
- Requests for extended time to complete missed quarters during the PANRE-LA exam administration due to circumstances other than extenuating personal medical issues, or for exceptions to the PANRE-LA Operational Policies, Procedures and Authorization that govern such requests.
- Requests to complete multiple quarters of the PANRE-LA exam within a single quarter.
- Requests to enter the PANRE-LA exam after April 30<sup>th</sup> or for exceptions to the PANRE-LA Operational Policies, Procedures and Authorization that govern such requests.

**ETP requests that pertain to changing the material requirements of an established NCCPA policy or procedure are not processed by the Review and Appeals Department as an ETP.** The Board of Directors examines NCCPA policies on a regular schedule and is provided information about requests for material policy changes. Policy changes may only be made by the Board of Directors and are not instituted retroactively.

### 3. Exam Administration

Incidents that occur during the administration of an exam, other than a medical emergency, do not qualify for an ETP review and must be submitted to NCCPA in the form of an exam grievance within three (3) business days of the date of the exam administration. More information on submitting an exam grievance can be found at: <http://www.nccpa.net/Legal>. PAs may request a review by NCCPA Review Committee when an exam grievance has been denied. Submittal of the associated fee is required. See NCCPA's *Review and Appeal Policies and Procedures* for information regarding filing a request for review.

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