

Guidance Document

To: Regulators & Other Members of the Public

From: Board for Branch Pilots

Date: August 1, 2012 (revised December 11, 2025)

Re: License Renewal Requirements

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to clarify what documentation branch pilots are required to provide as proof of a satisfactory physical examination conducted within the immediately preceding 60 days of renewal.

Background

§ 54.1-906 of the *Code of Virginia* mandates "...[a]ll licenses issued by the Board shall expire on December 31 of the year in which issued. Every pilot who holds a license as a branch pilot shall appear before the Board every twelve months, and, if the Board deems him qualified, it shall renew his license, which shall continue his term of office for one year following each renewal. Upon each renewal he shall appear before the clerk before whom he originally qualified, and renew his oath of office, but the bond given by him shall remain in force."

Section 18VAC45-20-20 states, in part:

- A. Each branch pilot seeking license renewal shall complete a renewal application, comply with the provisions of this section, and appear before the board or the board's license renewal committee which shall determine if the branch pilot possesses the qualifications to be renewed.
- B. Any limited branch pilot seeking license renewal shall meet the following standards:
 1. Furnish to the board evidence of a satisfactory physical examination conducted within the immediately preceding 60 days. If the branch pilot has not been subject to random chemical testing during the preceding 24 months, then this examination shall include the chemical tests referred to in 18VAC45-20-50;
 2. Furnish to the board evidence that the branch pilot has transited the waters embraced by the branch pilot's license during the preceding 12 months;
 3. After three years of licensure as a limited branch pilot, possess a valid First Class Pilot endorsement, with radar observer endorsement, issued by the U.S. Coast Guard for waters of the Commonwealth;

- C. Any full branch pilot seeking license renewal shall meet the following standards:
1. Possess a valid unlimited Federal Inland Masters credential with First Class Pilot endorsement, with radar observer endorsement, issued by the U.S. Coast Guard for waters of the Commonwealth;
 2. Furnish to the board evidence of a satisfactory physical examination conducted within the immediately preceding 60 days. If the branch pilot has not been subject to random chemical testing during the preceding 24 months, then this examination shall include the chemical tests referred to in 18VAC45-20-50;
 3. Furnish to the board evidence that the branch pilot has transited the waters embraced by the branch pilot's license during the preceding 12 months, and that the branch pilot has piloted 12 or more ships during that time, at least six trips as a pilot within the first six months of the calendar year and six trips as a pilot within the last six months of the calendar year. Upon the showing of good cause, the board may waive the requirements of this subdivision when, in its judgment, the pilot is otherwise qualified;
 4. Qualify in accordance with § 51.1-906 of the Code of Virginia;

Summary

Pilots must pass the required Merchant Mariner Credential Medical Evaluation to obtain a U.S. Coast Guard First Class Pilot endorsement or an Unlimited Federal Inland Master's credential with First Class Pilot endorsement, as required by 18VAC45-20-20.B.3, and 18VAC45-20-20.C.1.

Submission of a copy of the (verifying) Medical Practitioner Recommendation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Credential Medical Evaluation Report complies with 18VAC45-20-20.B.1 and 18VAC45-20-20.C.2.