

VII. LEAVES OF ABSENCE

Section: VII-K

K. Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)**K. Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)**

Note: This section of Policy is intended to set guidelines only and does not represent the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 in its entirety. FMLA procedures may differ from other types of County leave but FMLA does not provide any additional paid leave accruals over the County's other leave awards. (If further information is needed, contact the Human Resources Department.) FMLA use will be tracked concurrently with other types of leave where the reason for the leave is an FMLA-qualifying event. There are two general FMLA types, Basic Leave (see Section VII.L.1, et seq.) and Military Family Leave (see Section VII.L.15).

1. Basic FMLA Eligibility and Qualifying Events

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is not to be considered as a separate or distinct form of leave. Instead, it is a law which provides for protection for employees who take leave from work for a covered reason, regardless of the pay code used. The FMLA authorizes an employee with 12 months of County service, who has worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12 months preceding commencement of leave, a maximum of 12 workweeks of FMLA, job-protected, leave during a 12 month period. The 12 month-period is based on a rolling 12 month period beginning with the most recent day upon which coverage is requested and counting back 12 months. 12 workweeks of FMLA leave may be taken for the following reasons:

- a. The birth of a son or daughter of an employee and to care for the newborn child;
- b. The placement of a son or daughter with an employee for adoption or foster care (entitlement to leave for birth, placement for adoption or foster care of a son or daughter expires 12 months from the date of the birth or placement of the child);
- c. In order to care for the employee's spouse, son, daughter or natural or adoptive parent with a serious health condition.

For purposes of this policy, definitions of spouse, son, daughter or parent are:

- (1) Spouse means a husband or wife as defined or recognized under State law for purposes of marriage in the State where the employee resides. (Note: Florida does not recognize common law marriage.)
 - (2) Parent means a biological parent or an individual who stands or stood "in loco parentis" to an employee when the employee was a son or daughter as defined in (3) below. This term does not include parents "in law".
 - (3) Son or daughter means a biological, adopted, or foster child, a stepchild, a legal ward, or a child of a person standing "in loco parentis" who is either under age 18, or age 18 or older and "incapable of self-care because of a mental or physical disability."
- d. A serious health condition which renders the employee unable to perform one or more functions of the employee's position.

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- e. any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a covered military member on "covered active duty."

Twenty-six (26) workweeks of military caregiver FMLA leave may be taken during a single 12-month period to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness if the eligible employee is the servicemember's spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin.

2. Serious Health Condition

A "serious health condition" means an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either:

- a. In-patient care (i. e., an overnight stay) in a hospital, hospice facility, including any period of incapacity (for purposes of this policy defined to mean inability to work, attend school or perform other regular daily activities due to the serious health condition, treatment therefor, or recovery therefrom), or any subsequent treatment in connection with such in-patient care; or
- b. Continuing treatment by a health care provider, which includes any one or more of the following:
 - (1) A period of incapacity (i. e., inability to work, attend school or perform other regular daily activities due to the serious health condition, treatment therefore, or recovery there from) of more than three (3) consecutive calendar days, and any subsequent treatment or period of incapacity relating to the same condition, that also involves:
 - (a) Treatment two or more times by a health care provider, by a nurse or physician's assistant under direct supervision of a health care provider, or by a provider of health care services (e.g., physical therapist) under orders of, or on referral by, a health care provider; or
 - (b) Treatment by a health care provider on at least one occasion which results in a regimen of continuing treatment under the supervision of the health care provider.
 - (2) Any period of incapacity due to pregnancy, or for prenatal care.
 - (3) Any period of incapacity or treatment for such incapacity due to a chronic serious health condition.
 - (4) A period of incapacity which is permanent or long-term due to a condition for which treatment may not be effective.
 - (5) Any period of absence to receive multiple treatments (including any period of recovery there from) by a health care provider or by a provider of health care services under orders of, or on referral by, a health care provider, either for restorative surgery after an accident or other injury, or for a condition that would likely result in a period of incapacity of more than three consecutive calendar days in the absence of medical intervention or treatment, such as cancer (chemotherapy, radiation, etc.), severe arthritis (physical therapy), kidney disease (dialysis).

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- (6) FMLA leave for a serious health condition may be intermittent under the following circumstances: For intermittent leave or leave on a reduced leave schedule, there must be a medical need for leave (as distinguished from voluntary treatments and procedures) and it must be that such medical need can be best accommodated through an intermittent or reduced leave schedule. The treatment regimen and other information described in the certification of a serious health condition meets the requirement for certification of the medical necessity of intermittent leave or leave on a reduced leave schedule. Employees needing intermittent FMLA leave or leave on a reduced leave schedule must attempt to schedule their leave so as not to disrupt the employer's operations. In addition, the employer may assign an employee to an alternative position with equivalent pay and benefits that better accommodates the employee's intermittent or reduced leave schedule.
- c. When leave is taken after the birth, or placement of a child for adoption or foster care, an employee may take leave intermittently or on a reduced leave schedule only if the employer agrees. However, the employer's agreement is not required for leave during which the mother has a serious health condition in connection with the birth of her child or if the newborn child has a serious health condition.

3. Medical Certification

- a. The employer may require that an employee's leave to care for the employee's seriously ill spouse, son, daughter, or parent, or due to the employee's own serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform one or more of the essential functions of the employee's position, be supported by a medical certification issued by the certified health care provider of the employee or the employee's ill family member.
- b. When leave is foreseeable and at least 30 days notice has been provided, the employee should provide the medical certification before the leave begins. When this is not possible, the employee must provide the requested certification to the employer within the time frame requested by the employer (which must allow at least 15 calendar days after the employer's request), unless it is not practicable under the particular circumstances to do so despite the employee's diligent, good faith efforts. Failure to provide the appropriate healthcare certifications after having been requested to do so may result in disciplinary action, and/or in the delay or denial of approval of FMLA leave.
- c. In accordance with Department of Labor (DOL) rules, if the employer has reason to doubt the validity of the medical certification, the employer may request, at the employer's expense, a second or third health care provider's opinion for leave taken because of a serious health condition. The employer may also require subsequent recertification from the employee's health care provider on a reasonable basis, in accordance with DOL rules, which normally will not be more than every thirty (30) days. No second or third opinion on recertification may be required.

4. Spouses Working for the Same Employer

If both spouses work for the same employer (Board of County Commissioners), the combined leave shall not exceed 12 weeks in the 12-month period, if the leave is taken:

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- a. for birth of the employee's son or daughter or to care for the child after birth;
- b. for placement of a son or daughter with the employee for adoption or foster care, or to care for the child after placement; or
- c. to care for the employee's parent with a serious health condition.

5. Health Insurance Premiums

(Note: Any questions regarding employee health insurance premiums while under FMLA should be directed to Employee Health Benefits.)

- a. During FMLA leaves of absence, the employer will continue to pay its portion of the health insurance premiums and maintain the employee's coverage under the health plan in the same manner as if the employee had been continuously employed during the entire leave period, provided the employee continues to pay his or her share of the premiums normally paid by the employee.
- b. Should the employee fail to continue to pay his or her share of the premiums, notices of proposed insurance cancellation and the opportunity to pay the premium as required by the FMLA will be provided before cancellation.
- c. Employees will be advised well in advance of any changes in premiums so they will have ample opportunity to make arrangements to continue to pay their share of the premiums during the Family Medical Leave. To avoid required reimbursement, appropriate certification from a health care provider may be required if the employee does not return to work because of a serious health condition.

6. Benefit Accruals

- a. During FMLA leave, the FMLA does not require accrual of employment benefits, such as vacation leave, sick leave, etc. Accordingly, during unpaid FMLA leave, accrual of benefits shall be on the same basis as for any other unpaid leaves of absence. Paid FMLA leave will continue to accrue vacation, sick, etc., on the same basis as other types of paid leave. With respect to pension and other retirement plans, any period of unpaid FMLA leave shall not be treated as or counted toward a break in service for purposes of vesting and eligibility to participate. Employment benefits to which an employee may be entitled on the day on which the Family and Medical Leave of absence begins will not be lost because of such leave, except for those paid leave days substituted for leave taken under this policy.
- b. Employees on unpaid FMLA leave are to be treated as if they continued to work for purposes of changes to benefit plans. They are entitled to changes in benefits plans, except those which may be dependent upon seniority or accrual during the leave period, immediately upon return from leave or to the same extent they would have qualified if no leave had been taken.
- c. Employees will not be disqualified from bonuses based upon safety for which they qualified prior to leave because of the taking of FMLA leave.