

## **PAID PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to promote a family-friendly workplace at Harris County by providing paid leave to eligible employees to bond and care for a child after the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement.

### **ELIGIBILITY**

To be eligible for Paid Parental Leave and Infant Sick Leave, employees must meet the following criteria:

- Be a full-time, regular employee (part-time and temporary employees are not eligible); and
- Been employed with the County as a full-time, regular employee for at least six (6) continuous months prior to the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement of a child. Employees who have not reached six months of continuous employment may use other available paid leave, such as accrued vacation or compensatory time, for parental support purposes.

In addition, employees must meet one of the following criteria:

- Be a new parent by birth of a child;
- Be the new adoptive parent of a child who is 17 years or younger; or
- Be the foster parent to a new foster-to-adopt child who is 17 years or younger and placed with the foster parent.

This policy applies to a child that is newly added to the household through birth, adoption, or foster care and not a child who is already a member of the household. This policy also does not apply to the adoption of a stepchild by a stepparent.

If both parents work for Harris County, then each employee is entitled to their own paid leave.

### **PAID PARENTAL LEAVE**

Eligible employees will receive a maximum of eight (8) weeks of Paid Parental Leave for the birth, adoption or foster-to-adopt placement of a child/children that occurs in 2021, maximum of ten (10) weeks in 2022, and maximum of twelve (12) weeks in 2023 and beyond.

Multiple births, adoptions, or placements does not increase the length of Paid Parental Leave. An employee will not receive more than the maximum allotted amount of Paid Parental Leave in a rolling 12-month period, regardless of whether more than one birth, adoption, or placement event occurs within that 12-month time frame.

For child bonding purposes, Paid Parental Leave must be used entirely before other forms of paid or unpaid leave are used after the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement of a child.

Approved Paid Parental Leave may be taken at any time during the 12-month period immediately following the birth, adoption or foster-to-adopt placement of a child with the employee. Paid Parental Leave may not be used or extended beyond this 12-month time frame.

Employees must take Paid Parental Leave in one continuous period of leave unless the employee's Department Head allows the employee to use Paid Parental Leave intermittently.

Paid Parental Leave is compensated at the employee's regular rate of pay. Any unused Paid Parental Leave is not compensable and will be forfeited at the end of the 12-month time frame or when an employee separates from employment with Harris County or moves to an ineligible position, whichever occurs first.

Employees must follow their department's call-in procedures and provide periodic status reports to their department when on Paid Parental Leave.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF PAID PARENTAL LEAVE**

An employee may not use Paid Parental Leave in excess of the employee's normally scheduled workweek.

For Paid Parental Leave to be used on a part-time (intermittent) basis, the leave schedule must be consistent with the department's operational needs and be approved in writing by the Department Head prior to the beginning of the leave.

Eligible employees are strongly encouraged to plan in advance for when they expect to use Paid Parental Leave and communicate their plans to their immediate supervisor or Department Head, so they can do the necessary planning for their department's operational needs.

Paid Parental Leave must be used only for caring for or bonding with the child. Employees are not allowed to engage in any employment during the time the employee is taking Paid Parental Leave. Department Heads may take disciplinary action against an employee who uses Paid Parental Leave for purposes other than those described in this policy.

#### **COORDINATION WITH OTHER LEAVE**

Paid Parental Leave is a supplement to the employee's existing sick and other leave at the time of the qualifying event (birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement).

Paid Parental Leave is designed to run concurrently with FMLA and is not intended to extend the 12-week FMLA period. An employee on Paid Parental Leave who meets the FMLA eligibility requirements will be placed on FMLA leave at the start of the Paid Parental Leave. If the employee meets FMLA eligibility during the Paid Parental Leave period, the employee will be placed on FMLA at that time. All other requirements and provisions under the FMLA will apply.

The County will maintain all benefits for employees during the Paid Parental Leave period just as if they were taking any other County paid leave.

### **Requesting Paid Parental Leave**

Employees should notify their supervisor or Department Head of their intention to request Paid Parental Leave as soon as practicable and provide them with the anticipated start date and duration of the leave.

To receive Paid Parental Leave, eligible employees must complete a [Request for Paid Parental Leave Form](#) and submit it to their department's human resources representative.

The request must include appropriate documentation that shows that the employee's use of Paid Parental Leave is directly connected to a birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement of a child. If the employee is eligible for FMLA leave, the FMLA leave requirements will govern, and the FMLA documentation provided will be used to verify eligibility.

If the employee is not eligible for FMLA leave, proof of the birth or placement of the child must be provided.

The employee's name must be included as a legal parent on the birth certificate or legal document establishing paternity or establishing adoption/placement.

Documentation of the birth or adoption/placement of a child should be submitted as soon as it becomes available and no later than thirty (30) days after the birth or adoption/placement.

If the employee fails to provide the Department Head with the required documentation or certification within the specified time period, the Department Head may determine that the employee is not entitled to Paid Parental Leave and may require that the absence be charged to leave without pay or other forms of paid time off.

To validate an absence, appropriate documentation may be required at any time if requested by the department, Central HR, or Payroll.

Employees begin their Paid Parental Leave on the date specified in their request unless their child is born or adopted earlier or later. In these cases, employees need to notify their department and Central HR as soon as possible to be able to begin leave.

## **INFANT SICK LEAVE**

In recognition of the additional medical care needs of infants after birth, Harris County will provide eligible employees up to 40 hours of Infant Sick Leave to seek medical care for their infants during the infant's first year. An employee will not receive more than the maximum allotted amount of Infant Sick Leave in a rolling 12-month period, regardless of whether more than one birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement event occurs within that 12-month time frame. The Infant Sick Leave expires a year after the birth and also applies to adopted and foster-to-adopt placement infants. Eligible employees must provide medical documentation to support the need to use Infant Sick Leave.