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Why Paid Family Medical Leave is Good for Local Governments and Their Employees

All working people need time to welcome a new child home or care for a seriously ill family member. Yet too many North Carolinians are forced to choose between doing what is best for their families and earning the wages they need to support them. That's because federal law only requires employees to receive 90 days of *unpaid* family and medical leave—which millions of workers cannot afford to take.

Fortunately, county and municipal governments are leading the way in addressing this problem by enacting paid leave policies for local government employees. Since July 2016, 13 local governments across North Carolina have agreed to give their employees paid parental leave, and the state's largest county employer, Mecklenburg County, approved a broader paid family medical leave policy.

What is paid family medical leave/paid parental leave?

Paid family medical leave allows working people to take time off to welcome a new child into the family, recover from serious medical problems, or care for a seriously ill loved one.

Paid parental leave is a more limited version of family medical leave, and allows parents to take time off to welcome the birth or adoption of a new child, recover from the intense physical trauma of delivery, and develop healthy breastfeeding with their newborn. Under a typical paid family medical leave benefit, every employee can take a specified number of weeks of paid leave—typically 6-12 weeks.

How is paid family leave different than paid sick leave or paid vacation?

Paid family medical leave is not earned or accrued; rather, a fixed number of weeks is typically available to all employees who have completed their probationary status.

On the other hand, **paid sick days are typically earned and sharply limited.** For example, workers may earn an hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours they work, giving them between 7-10 sick days they can take each year. Similarly, workers are often allowed to accrue paid time off for vacation, typically earning 2-3 weeks paid time off per year for recreation.

What local governments currently offer paid leave to their employees?

Cities

Apex
Cary
Chapel Hill
Charlotte
Durham
Greensboro
Hillsborough
Morrisville
Raleigh

Rolesville
Winston-Salem

Counties

Durham County
Mecklenburg County
New Hanover
Orange County
Person County
Wake County

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Why should local governments offer paid parental/family leave?

- **It is a national scandal that working people have to choose between being there when their families need them most and earning a paycheck.** The United States is the only nation in the industrialized world that doesn't require all employers to provide their workers with paid family leave, forcing too many working people to choose between paying the bills and taking care of their health, or the health of their families.
- **Research has shown that paid family leave benefits workers, businesses, and the economy as a whole.** Paid leave also keeps new mothers attached to the workforce and earning higher wages in the years after childbirth than those that don't—a win-win for women and the overall economy.
- **Ensuring workers have paid time off to tend to a family health crisis results in better employee morale, loyalty and investment.** In turn, this boosts local government efficiency by reducing turnover and the costs associated with training new employees.
- Additionally, providing paid family leave to all workers **helps level the playing field for local governments as they compete with private sector employers for skilled workers.**

Why should local governments offer paid parental/family leave if workers can access paid sick days or paid vacation days?

While paid sick days and vacation time are certainly important for workers, they are no substitute for paid family medical leave.

Forcing employees to use limited sick time for an extended family medical situation virtually ensures that they will exhaust their paid sick leave before they have fully recovered. This forces employees to return to work too soon and ensures that they won't have paid time off to care for themselves when they inevitably fall sick later in the year, in turn elevating the risks of contagion for their families and co-workers.

Relying on vacation time creates similar problems, as most workers—especially newer employees—do not accrue enough paid vacation time to cover the time needed to recover from serious illness or surgery, or support a family member going through medical crisis.

Given different employees in different job classifications are often paid different wages and accrue vacation time at different rates, it is likely that that the lowest paid workers – who need their wages most – receive significantly less paid time off than others, and are forced to take unpaid leave.