

Parental Leave Committee Findings and Recommendation

December 2023

Overview

In the fall of 2023, the United Faculty Senate Association of Mississippi called for the formation of an ad hoc committee charged to research, prepare, and submit a proposal for paid parental leave for faculty employees of IHL universities in Mississippi. Representatives of this committee, comprised of members from each IHL university, will be presenting the following proposal to their respective faculty senates for recommendation to the IHL.

Background

Few life events compare with the immense joy — and challenges — of welcoming a child into your family. The arrival of the helpless infant quite literally upends your life. Sleepless nights, worry, fear, deep love, feelings of inadequacy — all these and more characterize the daily inner life of the new parent. Meanwhile, the child remains utterly reliant on his or her exhausted and drained grownup(s). Under the best of circumstances, returning to paid employment can pose serious conflicts for parents, both emotionally and simply practically. Yet in the state of Mississippi, workers must use their limited personal time and accrued medical leave to take any time off work with pay. For all too many parents, insufficient employment time or lack of funds make it all but impossible to devote themselves to their children in the most critical period of their development. For a state that prides itself on family values, Mississippi can and must do better.

Paid parental leave has become a major instrument in recruitment and retention of employees at major companies across the country. Those that offer such benefits experience significantly lower employee turnover rates, which translates directly into lower hiring, onboarding, and training costs (both time and money) as well as less institutional knowledge lossⁱ. After California instituted paid parental leave, the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that 91% of employers reported neutral or boosted profits as well as improved productivity, higher employee morale, and reduced turnoverⁱⁱ. At Google, when the pre-existing paid maternity leave of 12 weeks was increased to 18 weeks in 2007 (now 24 weeks), the employee loss rates dropped by 50%--they observed a similar effect when increasing paternity leave from 7 to 12 weeks^{1,iii,iv}. From this, one can safely infer that in Mississippi going from zero to 12 weeks of paid parental leave for faculty members would have a dramatically positive effect on employees and employers.

Current Mississippi University System Policies

Currently, the only parental leave allotted to faculty members of the Mississippi University System is that which is federally mandated under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Under federal law, an employee who has worked for their employer at least 12 months, at least 1,250 hours over the past 12 months, and works at a location where the company employs 50 or more employees within 75 miles, is entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year^v. This leave is comprised of first major medical leave (MML) and then personal leave. The remainder of the 12 weeks if taken is unpaid, and the employee must pay to continue benefits during unpaid leave. MML is accrued at the following rate (Table 1):

Table 1: MML accrual rate for Mississippi Employees:

Continuous Service	Accrual Rate Per Month	Accrual Rate Per Year
1 month to 36 months	8 hours	96 hours
37 months to 96 months	7 hours	84 hours
97 months to 180 months	6 hours	72 hours
Over 180 months	5 hours	60 hours

It is worth noting at this rate, it takes over four years to accrue enough MML to cover the 12 weeks of otherwise unpaid leave afforded under FLMA (assuming the employee works until the birth date). As a result, faculty members must choose between forgoing a portion of this parental bonding time allotted under FLMA or forgoing income, which in many cases is not a viable option.

Current Peer Institution Policies

Providing paid parental leave for faculty members at Mississippi public institutions would bring us in line with some peer institutions in our region and make us more desirable than others. Referencing unpublished data compiled by Christy S. Neilson (University of Mississippi Patterson School of Accountancy) in 2018^{vi}, out of 49 public four-year institutions in the south census region (including two from Mississippi), 24.5% provided 16-24 weeks paid leave, 18.4% provided four-to-eight weeks, and 57.1% did not provide paid leave. The University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa & Birmingham), and multiple universities in Texas and Florida, all have paid parental leave policies for faculty. By instituting a paid parental leave policy in Mississippi, our competitive standing for faculty recruitment and retention would increase not only in our region but make us a more competitive option nationally. Of the 82 public four-year institutions in this 2018 survey outside of the south region, over half (54.9%) provided paid parental leave. In this same survey, the average independent ranking of universities with paid parental leave policies (incl. all national regions) was 89.3, as opposed to the average ranking for those without leave at 139.9. As the data indicates, universities with paid parental leave generally enjoy better academic reputations than those without paid parental leave.

Proposal

The proposed Paid Parental Leave (PPL) policy provides 12 weeks of paid time off for FMLA eligible employees to be used concurrently with FLMA for the birth or adoption of a child. The goal is to allow the employee time to bond with a newly born, adopted, or fostered child without the added financial burden of income forbearance or exhaustion of MML and personal leave. In addition, the employee maintains all of the benefits afforded under FMLA, including job protection, continued health insurance, and protection from discrimination or retaliation. In accordance with FMLA, job protection means employees are entitled to return to the same job, or a comparable one, after returning from PPL. A comparable job is one with comparable employment benefits, pay, and other terms and conditions of employment. Employees keep their health insurance while on PPL on the same terms as if they continued to work. For example, if an employee ordinarily contributes to the cost of health insurance, the employee must continue to pay their portion of the cost while on leave. Employers are prohibited from discriminating or retaliating against employees for requesting or taking PPL. Discrimination or retaliation can include the employer not returning the employee to the same or a comparable job, terminating employment, reducing pay or benefits, or disciplining the employee in any way. The employer has a right to advance notice from the employee. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in a delay in the start of paid parental leave.

Conclusion

It is the well-researched opinion of this committee that granting 12 weeks of paid parental leave to faculty employees of IHL universities of Mississippi will have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of faculty, intellectual growth of IHL institutions, morale of employees, and Mississippi family values.

Signatories

DocuSigned by:

Caroline A. Walker

5519B46718F24B8...

Prof. Caroline A. Walker
University of Mississippi Medical Center
Parental Leave Committee Chair

DocuSigned by:



DOE181E07E1647A...

Prof. Brian S. Burnes
Mississippi University for Women
Parental Leave Committee Member

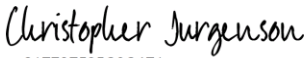
DocuSigned by:



F110795DA2E9453

Prof. James Chamberlain
Mississippi State University
Parental Leave Committee Member

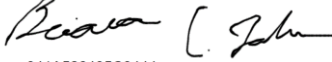
DocuSigned by:



21F78F535C0C4F1

Prof. Christopher Jurgenson
Delta State University
Parental Leave Committee Member

DocuSigned by:



041A526405C0444...

Prof. Brianna Jahn
University of Southern Mississippi
Parental Leave Committee Member

DocuSigned by:



FE37082BA57B476...

Prof. Dawn McLin
Jackson State University
Parental Leave Committee Member

DocuSigned by:



960F6E0ADDD04E6

Prof. Marc. E. Walker
University of Mississippi Medical Center
Parental Leave Committee Member

DocuSigned by:



89CD427842D7464...

Prof. Alex Watson
University of Mississippi
Parental Leave Committee Member

-
- ⁱ Paid Maternity Leave is Good for Business. *Wall Street Journal*. Susan Wojcicki. Published December 16, 2014. Accessed November 18, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/susan-wojcicki-paid-maternity-leave-is-good-for-business-1418773756>
- ⁱⁱ Leave That Pays. *Center for Economic and Policy Research*. Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman. 2011. Accessed online November 18, 2023. <https://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Google Just Increased Parental Leave to 24 Weeks—Here’s How That Compares to Other Tech Giants. *Forbes*. Lisa Kim. Published January 27, 2022. Accessed online November 30, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisakim/2022/01/27/google-just-increased-parental-leave-to-24-weeks-heres-how-that-compares-to-other-tech-giants/?sh=7cf62acd2b33>
- ^{iv} Google Bumps Up Vacation Days and Parental Leave. *Reuters*. Paresh Dave. Published January 27, 2022. Accessed online November 30, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-bumps-up-vacation-days-parental-leaves-2022-01-27/>
- ^v Family and Medical Leave Act. U.S> Department of Labor.
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla>
- ^{vi} Neilson, C. University of Mississippi Patterson School of Accountancy.
<https://olemiss.box.com/s/9fanh7fszo32yk02wcrem24wytkm2kn>