

# South Florida governments embrace paid parental leave

April 11, 2017, 7:45pm

It's a benefit most private sector workers in South Florida don't have.

But increasingly, city and county governments are giving employees paid time off to stay home with a new child.

Palm Beach County will start offering six weeks of paid parental leave by the end of the month to about 1,800 employees not covered by union agreements, said Nancy Bolton, assistant county administrator.

The new program applies to both fathers and mothers. It's available to employees who give birth, adopt or foster a child. County officials estimate it will cost about \$195,500 a year.

Miami-Dade County, West Palm Beach, Wellington, Miami Beach and Doral now offer paid parental leave. Broward County officials are evaluating their options, said Kevin Kelleher, deputy chief financial officer.

Brad Harrington, executive director of the Boston College Center for Work & Family, said local governments across the nation, particularly in Democratic-leaning communities, have been embracing paid parental leave policies.

It's also been a hot political issue. On the campaign trail, President Donald Trump supported paid leave for new mothers.

Passed in 1993, the Family and Medical Leave Act requires employers to provide up to 12 weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave to care for a new child.

The United States, though, is among only a handful of countries that doesn't mandate that leave be paid.

In the private sector, it's typically "large progressive employers" looking to attract millennials that have started to offer generous paid leave, Harrington said.

"There are a lot of organizations that are larger and have a higher profile that seem to be taking not just a two-week step forward but two months or more," he said.

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/palm-beach/fl-pn-parental-leave-finalized-20170411-story.html>

That's generated headlines touting benefits most employees can only dream of.

Netflix says its employees can have unlimited paid time off during a child's first year. American Express offers 20 weeks paid time off to new parents. Employees at Facebook can take up to four months off.

American Airlines, one of South Florida's largest employers with a hub in Miami, started offering up to 10 weeks paid time off on March 1 to new mothers, along with up to \$4,000 in expense reimbursement for employees who adopt.

But despite those changes, the perk remains rare in the private sector. Only 13 percent of private sector employees had access to paid parental leave in 2016, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

A recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management and the Families and Work Institute did not find a dramatic expansion of paid parental leave from 2012 to 2016, despite high-profile announcements by big companies.

The percentage of companies offering parental leave with full pay dropped from 17 percent in 2005 to 10 percent in 2016, according to the survey of more than 900 employers across the country.

Lisa I. Perez, president of Pembroke Pines-based human resources consulting firm HBL Resources Inc., said she hasn't seen a spike of interest from her clients, which include small and midsize businesses in South Florida. Most companies she works with require employees use sick time, vacation days and short-term disability to cover pregnancy and childbirth.

But as more public sector employers and large companies start offering the benefit, interest could increase, she said.

"Employers who care about becoming employers of choice have to stay competitive," Perez said. "It is going to start to put some pressure on those businesses."

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