



Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

January 23, 2017

Vol. XXXII — No. 3

321 16th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144 — 906 Columbia St SW, Olympia, WA 98501 — 360-943-0608



Time has come for paid leave

After 10 years, a bipartisan effort for paid family, medical and military leave

In 2007, when Democrats controlled Washington's House, Senate and Governor's Office, they approved historic legislation to create a modest paid family leave program. It was intended to help new parents afford to take a few weeks off with the birth or adoption of a child. However, Gov. Chris Gregoire couldn't agree with the Legislature on how to fund the program so, although it remained on the books, it was dormant and no one received its benefits. In the years since, at the behest of business lobbying groups, Republicans in Olympia unsuccessfully sought to repeal the unfunded program to make sure no one ever benefited.

Ten years later, there is finally movement toward a bipartisan solution.

The Democrats have introduced HB 1116, sponsored by Rep. June Robinson (D-Everett), and SB 5032 by the Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent), who sponsored the original 2007 bill. These companion bills would offer up to \$1,000/week for up to 26 weeks for the birth or adoption of a child, for a family member's serious health condition or for leave needed for a military reason, starting on Oct. 1, 2019. It would include up to 12 weeks more in the case of a serious personal medical condition. It would be funded by a 0.255 percent payroll tax on employers, who could deduct up to one half of that amount from employees' wages.

Sen. Joe Fain (R-Auburn) has introduced a less-generous plan of up to about \$540 for up to 12 weeks, phased in over the next several years, and funded entirely by workers. In addition to Fain, other Republicans are also expressing support for the concept.

"Paid family leave should be available to everyone -- not just the rich or well situated," said Lynne Dodson, Secretary Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, in the House Labor and Workforce Standards Committee on Thursday. "A good policy will be flexible, portable, accessible to all, and provide adequate income so people can use it. HB 1116 does this."

As legislators seek common ground on this policy, the WSLC urges the following elements be included in the policy:

- The cost of the program should be shared between workers and employers, and 50/50 is a fair ratio.
- It should cover both family leave for bonding and caregiving AND disability leave for a worker's own serious medical issue.
- It should not preempt local government leave regulation. State government should not block local officials and voters from establishing labor standards best suited for their cities.
- Benefits should be progressive, with a higher percentage of wage replacement for lower wage workers, so the benefits are sufficient for all workers to effectively access leave.
- It should include protections so workers don't need to worry about losing their jobs for utilizing the leave.
- It should allow independent contractors and small business owners to opt in if they so choose.

After 10 years, Washington can finally join other states in offering a policy that promotes better health outcomes for parents, children and other family members, plus important benefits for military families and veterans. Let's make it happen in 2017!

Some important hearings this week

MONDAY, Jan. 23 -- At 1:30 p.m., Senate Commerce, Labor & Sports will hold a work session on the state workers' compensation system and hear bills that would expand lump-sum buyouts of injured workers, redefine occupational disease, and other changes to restrict eligibility and reduce employers' costs.

MONDAY, Jan. 23 -- At 1:30 p.m., House Labor and Workforce Standards will hear wage theft bills including HB 1300 on misclassification/fraud, HB 1301 discouraging employer retaliation, HB 1302 ensuring damages for wage theft are sufficient to discourage it; and HB 1486 creating the Wage Recovery Act.

TUESDAY, Jan. 24 -- At 1:30 p.m., House Labor and Workforce Standards will hear bills promoting equal pay, including HB 1447 to allow workers to discuss and compare wages without fear of retaliation; and HB 1237 allowing full-scope collective bargaining so colleges can use local funds in negotiating faculty/staff wages.

Stay tuned to TheStand.org for details on these and other bills.