

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1073

As Reported by House Committee On:
Labor & Workplace Standards

Title: An act relating to expanding coverage of the paid family and medical leave program.

Brief Description: Expanding coverage of the paid family and medical leave program.

Sponsors: Representatives Berry, Wicks, Fitzgibbon, Bateman, Tharinger, Simmons, Kloba, Ramel, Ortiz-Self, Goodman, Ryu, Bronoske, Hackney, Chopp, Riccelli, Stonier, Frame, Macri, Davis, Pollet, Bergquist and Harris-Talley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Labor & Workplace Standards: 1/15/21, 2/5/21 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Modifies the definition of "family member" for Paid Family and Medical Leave.
- Provides temporary alternate eligibility for claims through June 30, 2022.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKPLACE STANDARDS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Sells, Chair; Berry, Vice Chair; Bronoske and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hoff, Ranking Minority Member; Mosbrucker, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Lily Smith (786-7175).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

The Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program was enacted to provide partial wage replacement to employees on leave for specified family and medical reasons. It is funded through premiums paid by employers and employees. The Employment Security Department (Department) administers the program.

Coverage.

Employees are eligible for benefits under the PFML program after working at least 820 hours in a qualifying period.

A "family member" under the PFML program means a child, grandchild, grandparent, parent, sibling, or spouse.

Job Protection.

An employee returning from PFML leave is entitled to be restored to a same or equivalent job when the following applies:

- the employer has 50 or more employees;
- the employee has been with the employer for 12 months or more; and
- the employee has worked for the employer for at least 1,250 hours during the immediately preceding 12 month period.

Health Benefits.

An employer must maintain the existing health benefits of an employee during PFML leave when otherwise required by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

The FMLA provides eligible employees with unpaid leave, and generally requires maintenance of health benefits during leave. The FMLA applies to employees meeting work duration requirements for public employers or for private employers with 50 or more employees.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The definition of "family member" is expanded beginning September 1, 2021, to include any individual who regularly resides in the employee's home or where the relationship creates an expectation that the employee care for the person, and that individual depends on the employee for care.

Limited alternate eligibility is provided for claims between January 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, for employees not meeting the existing hours worked threshold for 2020 or the first calendar quarter of 2021, through:

- two alternate lookback qualifying periods across 2019 and the first calendar quarter of 2020; and

- one alternate qualifying period of 520 hours worked in the first quarter of 2020.

The alternate eligibility does not apply to employees that do not meet the existing hours worked threshold because of an employment separation due to misconduct or voluntary separations unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic.

An emergency clause is provided, and an immediate effective date applies to the alternate eligibility provisions.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes the modified employee eligibility threshold of \$1,000 earned and the expanded job protection and health benefit continuation provisions.

Limited alternate eligibility is provided for claims between January 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

The expanded definition of "family member" is modified, and takes effect September 1, 2021.

An intent section and emergency clause are added, with an immediate effective date applicable to the new alternate eligibility provisions. A null and void clause is added, making the bill null and void if funding for the bill is not provided in the operating budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except for section 2, relating to definitions, which takes effect September 1, 2021. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The purpose of the PFML program was to provide broad access to workers in all types of work, and it is now clear it needs to expand. Expanding coverage would have a large positive impact compared to the cost, and is important to support infant bonding. The hours worked threshold disqualifies many workers who need paid leave, particularly after the shutdowns during this past year, and there is an urgent need for support. Moving to a wage-based threshold would make it less likely that certain temporary or part-time positions, such as in academia, lose out on benefits. Women and women of color have been disproportionately impacted and will experience a cumulative financial effect. Affinity relationships in caretaking within communities of color should be taken into account. Many

vulnerable workers are afraid to take their entitled leave because they are not covered under the job protection provisions. Our state's program has been surpassed by other states with broader eligibility and application to family members. Paid family and medical leave levels the playing field for businesses competing for employees.

(Opposed) The PFML program was heavily negotiated and reflects a careful balance between costs to employers and benefits to employees. The definition of "family member" was a part of that balance. Under the bill, a family member could mean a variety of people depending on your relationships, and determining those boundaries is problematic. This bill was not brought before the PFML Advisory Committee and the business community was not consulted. The PFML law is new and not ready for this degree of changes. The program itself has not been fully implemented. For example, the grant programs for small businesses have not been available until recently. The costs of the continuation of health benefits alone could make it prohibitive to backfill an employee's absence, and the costs as a whole look like they will affect premiums and trigger a surcharge. To address issues related to the pandemic, temporary instead of blanket action should be considered. The wage-based threshold would not necessarily promote equity.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Berry, prime sponsor; Marilyn Watkins, Economic Opportunity Institute; Scarlett To; Elizabeth Perez; Karen Anderson, American Association of University Women of Washington; Sam Schroeder, Olympia Coffee Roasters; Andrea Schmitt, Columbia Legal Services; Michael Arenson, Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; Laura Beal; and Emily Myers, United Auto Workers.

(Opposed) Candice Bock, Association of Washington Cities; Bob Battles, Association of Washington Business; Julia Gorton, Washington Hospitality Association; Christine Brewer, Brewer Public Affairs; Tammie Hetrick, Washington Food Industry Association; Gary Smith, Independent Business Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.