

OCTOBER 22, 2026 | STATE & LOCAL TRENDS

D.C. Cuts Certain Paid Family Leave Benefits Effective October 1, 2026: What Employers Need to Know

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On October 1, 2026, significant amendments to the District of Columbia's Paid Family Leave ("PFL") program took effect as part of the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Support Act of 2026. While the changes do not alter employer contribution requirements or core compliance obligations, they do reduce the amount of leave available for certain types of claims and lower the maximum weekly benefit available to employees.

For employers with employees working in the District, now is an appropriate time to review leave policies, update required notices, and ensure human resources personnel understand how the revised benefit structure may affect workforce planning and employee communications.

What Changed?

Effective October 1, 2026, to help address District budget constraints and redirect surplus and revenue from the Universal Paid Leave Fund, the District reduced the maximum benefits available for two categories of Paid Family Leave:

- Medical Leave decreased from 12 weeks to 10 weeks.
- Family Leave decreased from 12 weeks to 6 weeks.
 - The maximum weekly benefit amount decreased from \$1,190 to \$1,100.

These changes apply under the District's publicly administered Paid Family Leave program, which is administered by the DC Department of Employment Services ("DOES"). Notably, Mayor Muriel Bowser originally proposed even steeper cuts, including temporarily eliminating family and medical leave entirely for FY 2027, to free up money from the Universal Paid Leave Fund to help plug gaps in the District's general fund. The D.C. Council, however, rejected a total elimination of those benefits and instead opted for a temporary rollback as set forth above.

What Did Not Change?

Several important aspects of the program remain unchanged:

- Prenatal Leave remains available for up to two weeks.
- Parental Leave remains available for up to 12 weeks.
- The program continues to be funded exclusively through employer contributions.
- Employees are not required to make payroll contributions.
- The wage replacement formula, including benefits of up to 90% of wages for qualifying employees, remains unchanged.

As a result, while some benefit durations have been shortened, D.C.'s Paid Family Leave program continues to provide wage replacement and leave benefits for eligible employees.

What Employers Should Do Now

Although DOES has stated that employer obligations are not changing, employers should not view these amendments as requiring no action. At a minimum, employers should consider the following:

Review and Update Leave Policies

Handbooks, leave policies, and employee-facing materials that describe D.C. Paid Family Leave benefits should be reviewed for accuracy. Otherwise, your company may continue to inadvertently offer more leave than is required under the current law.

Update Required Notices

DOES expressly advises employers to update the Mandatory Employee Notice to reflect the revised benefit structure. Employers must continue to post the notice in a location accessible to employees.

Train Human Resources and Managers

Employees planning upcoming leaves may have questions regarding eligibility, available benefits, and how the changes affect pending or future claims. HR professionals and managers should be prepared to direct employees to accurate information and avoid inadvertently providing incorrect leave guidance.

Consider Interplay with Other Leave Laws

Employers should remember that changes to D.C. Paid Family Leave benefits do not affect separate obligations that may arise under the FMLA, the D.C. Family and Medical Leave Act, the ADA, the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, or other applicable leave and accommodation requirements. As always, employers should evaluate leave requests under all potentially applicable laws.

Takeaway

In short, the District of Columbia has made a notable change to the D.C. Paid Family Leave program, but employers with D.C.-based employees should not mistake a reduction in benefits for a reduction in compliance obligations. Although employer funding and notice obligations remain unchanged, employers should update policies, employee communications, and manager training to reflect the new benefit structure that took effect October 1, 2026.

