

Campus Signal:

Managing Employee Leave Under FMLA & State Leave Laws

Guiding public schools and municipalities through benefits, compliance, and care

Concept Overview: Managing employee leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act requires more than simply approving time off. Public employers must evaluate eligibility, provide statutory notices, track leave accurately, and coordinate payroll and benefit continuation procedures. Even in states that primarily rely on federal FMLA standards, administrative inconsistency can create legal exposure and operational disruption.

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Common FMLA qualifying reasons include:

- Birth of a child or placement for adoption
- Employee's serious health condition
- Care for a spouse, child, or parent with a serious health condition
- Qualifying military exigencies
- Care for a covered service member

FMLA applies to public agencies regardless of size (29 U.S.C. §2611(4)(A)(iii)). Eligible employees may take up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period (29 U.S.C. §2612(a)(1)).

Why this Matters for Districts & Municipalities

District Perspective

School districts frequently manage leave tied to academic calendars, substitute placement logistics, and intermittent medical leave. Without consistent designation and tracking procedures, districts risk delayed notices, payroll discrepancies, and confusion over return-to-work timelines.

Municipal Perspective

Cities and counties often administer leave across multiple departments, including public safety, utilities, and administrative services. Rotating schedules and overtime calculations complicate eligibility determinations. Inconsistent application across departments increases exposure to interference or retaliation claims.

Clear, centralized oversight protects both compliance and operational continuity.



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Case Study:

Alpha School District & Beta Municipality

Alpha School District

Alpha School District experienced an increase in intermittent leave requests and extended medical absences across instructional and support staff. Eligibility determinations were sometimes delayed due to inconsistent routing between supervisors and HR. Required notices were not issued uniformly within regulatory timelines. Leadership recognized that structured designation procedures were necessary to reduce compliance risk.

Key Issues Identified

- Delayed eligibility and designation notices
- Inconsistent tracking of intermittent leave hours
- Confusion regarding benefits premium handling
- Misalignment between HR records and payroll deductions

Impact on the District

- Increased exposure to FMLA interference allegations
- Payroll errors during unpaid leave periods
- Employee disputes regarding benefits continuation

What Alpha School District Implemented

- Centralized HR designation authority
- Standard notice templates and internal timing controls
- Supervisor training on routing leave requests
- Payroll reconciliation checkpoints for unpaid leave

Outcome

Alpha School District reduced leave-related disputes after standardizing designation and tracking procedures. Administrative consistency improved and payroll correction volume declined.

Beta Municipality

Beta City Government encountered challenges coordinating leave across departments with rotating schedules and varying hour calculations. Eligibility determinations were not applied consistently across divisions. Documentation practices varied, and premium collection during unpaid leave lacked uniform standards. City leadership moved to centralize leave administration.

Key Issues Identified

- Department-level eligibility determinations
- Miscalculation of hours for rotating shifts
- Inconsistent documentation practices
- Delayed premium collection during unpaid leave

Impact on the City

- Compliance exposure from inconsistent designation
- Budget uncertainty from payroll rework
- Employee complaints regarding leave balances

What Beta Municipality Implemented

- Central HR-controlled eligibility review
- Uniform hour-tracking methodology
- Standardized documentation requirements
- Clear premium payment procedures prior to unpaid leave

Outcome

Beta City Government reduced compliance risk and administrative inconsistencies after centralizing leave oversight. Departments reported fewer grievances and improved predictability in leave administration.

Alpha School District and Beta Municipality are a representative name used by Campus Benefits to illustrate actual cases drawn from real experiences. All identifying information has been anonymized for educational purposes.

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Administration & Workflow Analysis

Leave compliance failures typically stem from inconsistent workflows rather than legal misunderstandings. Multiple entry points for leave requests, lack of documentation controls, and poor HR-payroll coordination create systemic risk.

Common pressure points include:

- Failure to designate leave timely once sufficient information is received
- Inconsistent hour calculations for eligibility
- Poor coordination between HR and payroll during unpaid leave
- Lack of clarity regarding premium collection procedures
- Inconsistent supervisor training and routing expectations

Structured workflows and centralized review significantly reduce exposure.

Action Step	Purpose	Legal Reference	Frequency
Verify eligibility (12 months/1,250 hours)	Confirm statutory qualification	29 U.S.C. 2611(2)	Each Request
Issue eligibility & rights notice	Meet notice obligations	29 C.F.R. 825.300	Each Request
Designate leave formally	Reduce interference risk	29 C.F.R. 825.300 (d)	Each Request
Maintain group health coverage	Ensure benefit continuation	29 U.S.C. 2614 (c)	During Leave
Reconcile payroll & premiums	Prevent deduction errors	Internal controls	Monthly

Closing Insight & Lessons Learned

FMLA administration requires procedural discipline as much as legal knowledge. Public employers that formalize designation timelines, centralize eligibility determinations, and align payroll coordination reduce legal exposure and employee confusion. Clear communication before and during unpaid leave strengthens compliance and operational stability.

Quick Takeaways



Leave designation must be timely and documented



Eligibility calculations must be consistent across departments



Premium handling procedures should be explained before unpaid leave begins



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Legal & Compliance Framework

Federal FMLA Requirements

- Public agencies are covered employers under 29 U.S.C. §2611(4)(A)(iii).
- Employees must have 12 months of service and 1,250 hours worked in the preceding 12 months (29 U.S.C. §2611(2)).
- Employers must provide eligibility and rights notices within regulatory timelines (29 C.F.R. §825.300).
- Group health benefits must be maintained during FMLA leave under the same conditions as if the employee had continued working (29 U.S.C. §2614(c)).

State Leave Law Considerations

- Some states provide paid family leave or expanded medical leave rights.
- Both Georgia and Mississippi primarily rely on the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for unpaid, job-protected leave, rather than having separate, comprehensive state-level FMLA laws.
- Georgia State Employees: The Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) provides specific guidelines for state employees, mirroring federal requirements for leave, including military exigency and care for family members.
- GA and MS follow these standards, with no mandated state-paid, family-medical leave laws beyond federal requirements.

Benefits & Payroll Coordination

- Employers must determine how employee premiums will be paid during unpaid leave.
- Improper leave tracking may create restoration errors or benefit disputes.
- COBRA obligations may arise if coverage lapses or employment status changes (29 U.S.C. §1161).

Key Aspects of FMLA and COBRA Interaction

COBRA obligations may arise under 29 U.S.C. §1161 if an employee does not return to work after FMLA leave, resulting in a loss of coverage. While FMLA leave itself is not a qualifying event, a COBRA-qualifying event occurs when the obligation to maintain health benefits ends because the employee terminates employment or fails to return.

- **Trigger Event:** A COBRA qualifying event occurs on the last day of FMLA leave if the employee does not return, or on the date they notify the employer they are not returning.
- **Coverage Maintenance:** Employers must maintain group health coverage during FMLA leave as if the employee were still working.
- **Non-Payment of Premiums:** If an employee fails to pay their share of premiums during FMLA leave, coverage may lapse, but this does not immediately trigger COBRA until the FMLA leave ends.
- **Maximum Coverage Period:** The maximum COBRA coverage period is generally measured from the date of the qualifying event (e.g., the last day of FMLA leave[BL1]).

[BL1] If an employee fails to return to work, the employer must offer COBRA, enabling them to continue coverage.

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Model Policy Excerpt

The District/City shall administer all family and medical leave requests in accordance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (29 U.S.C. §2601 et seq.) and applicable federal regulations. Eligibility determinations, required notices, and formal designation shall be issued within regulatory timelines. Group health benefits shall be maintained during approved FMLA leave under the same conditions as active employment, and premium collection procedures shall be clearly communicated prior to any unpaid leave period.

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COMPASS COMPANION

The following document is for your organization's administration to better understand the Compass Companion guide available for your organization's employees. *For Admin Use Only*

WHAT IS COMPASS

This Benefit Signals issue is paired with an employee-facing Campus Benefits Compass guide that translates this topic into clear, practical steps for staff. The Compass edition clarifies what qualifies as protected leave, what documentation is required, and how benefits and pay may be affected. Districts and municipalities may benefit from the template of the Compass guide when leave is requested or during onboarding to reduce confusion.

HOW TO USE THIS COMPASS GUIDE

Step 1: Download the Compass companion piece separately

Step 2: Fill in your contact information so employees know who to reach out to with questions.

Step 3: Distribute the piece to your employees in whatever format works best for your organization.

- Share it when employees inquire about medical or family leave.
- Use it during supervisor training for consistent messaging.
- Include it in leave designation communications.

** If you would like a more customized piece tailored to your specific organization, please email together@campusbenefits.com.*

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