



## Proposal for Paid Family Leave

**To:** Ms. Jan Van Der Kley and Dr. Warren Hills

**From:** Administrative Professional Association

**Re:** Paid Family Leave

Western Michigan University is a leader in Higher Education. Paid family leave is a rapidly growing trend in universities across the country, allowing employees to be with their families when they're needed most. Providing paid family leave improves retention, productivity, and competitiveness, and is strongly aligned with our values as we strive to build the future with an inclusive and sustainable workforce that places Western at the forefront of Michigan universities.

We have an opportunity to become leaders in paid family leave.

This document outlines our proposal for a paid family leave policy at Western Michigan University. The APA looks forward to discussing it with you in our meeting scheduled on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Thank you in advance,

- William McQuitty, Janice Quakenbush, Stephanie Radant, Kelly Reed, Ashley Glass, Alice Molvern, Jennifer Klauth
- With the support of:
  - Association Council of the WMU-AAUP,
  - College of Arts and Sciences Women's Caucus,
  - Western Moms United,
  - WMU Police Officer's Association Board,
  - WMU Professional Support Staff Organization Executive Board

# Why Paid Family Leave

Western Michigan University values families, cares about its employees, prides itself on employee retention and staff development, and strives to create a positive work culture. We must continue to evolve our benefits in order to align with our values and to remain competitive with talent recruitment and current employee retention.

## **A strong paid family leave policy can:**

- Strengthens employee loyalty and retention, boosting morale and mental health<sup>1</sup>
- Distinguishes our institution and makes hiring talented employees more competitive and attractive
- Provides our university with opportunities for reputation-boosting PR as we set ourselves apart from many of our peers
- Improve the health of children and families, as well as support greater gender equity in the workplace<sup>2</sup>

## What our Employees Say: Testimonials

“We had originally planned to start trying to get pregnant in late 2020 early 2021. When COVID-19 hit and we were forced to drain our annual leave and sick leave it meant reevaluating our plans. . . . With hour reductions sick leave is building very slowly and now we aren’t sure if we risk not being able to have a child by waiting longer to try, risk not having enough leave at birth. . . , or leaving WMU completely for a company that has better family centered policies.”

--Anonymous

“I dealt with various layers of policy that felt like they were working against me as my husband and I were starting our family. I was a temporary employee for approximately two years, so not benefits-eligible with my first son, and had to go unpaid for my entire leave. . . . I felt significant financial pressure to return after 7 weeks. With my second son, I became benefits eligible right at the start of my pregnancy, resulting in a denied long-term disability claim, which I was provided no HR support with. . . . My second delivery was a planned cesarean section, so again, a recommendation of 8 weeks leave for recovery, yet again I felt financial pressure to return after 7 weeks to allow my income to resume. . . . I was left feeling that I was being punished as an employee, in spite of maintaining high quality work, for deciding to start a family.”

--Anonymous

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<sup>1</sup> Boston Consulting Group 2017 “Why Paid Family Leave is Good for Business”

<sup>2</sup> New America Foundation 2017 “Paid Family Leave: How Much Time is Enough”  
<https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/policy-papers/paid-family-leave/>

# Our Current Policy<sup>3</sup>

## **Family and Medical Leave of Absence**

Western Michigan University complies with the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) in granting family and medical leaves of absence to eligible employees.

To request a family and medical leave of absence, please contact your HR Representative via phone or email to schedule an appointment. During this appointment, the HR Representative will discuss family and medical leave and other leave options.

## **Purpose**

The FMLA provides leave for the situations listed below:

- For an employee's own serious health condition.
- To care for a spouse, child or parent who has a serious health condition.
- For the birth of a child and the care of this newborn.
- For placement of a child with the employee in adoption or foster care.
- For an exigency concerning a spouse, child or parent on active duty or called to duty in the National Guard or military reserves.
- For the care of an employee's spouse, child, parent or next of kin who is a covered service member with a serious illness or injury.

## **Eligibility**

To be eligible for a family and medical leave of absence, an employee must meet the following general conditions:

- Employed for at least one year.
- Worked 1,250 or more hours within the last 12 months.

## **Pay and benefits during a family and medical leave of absence**

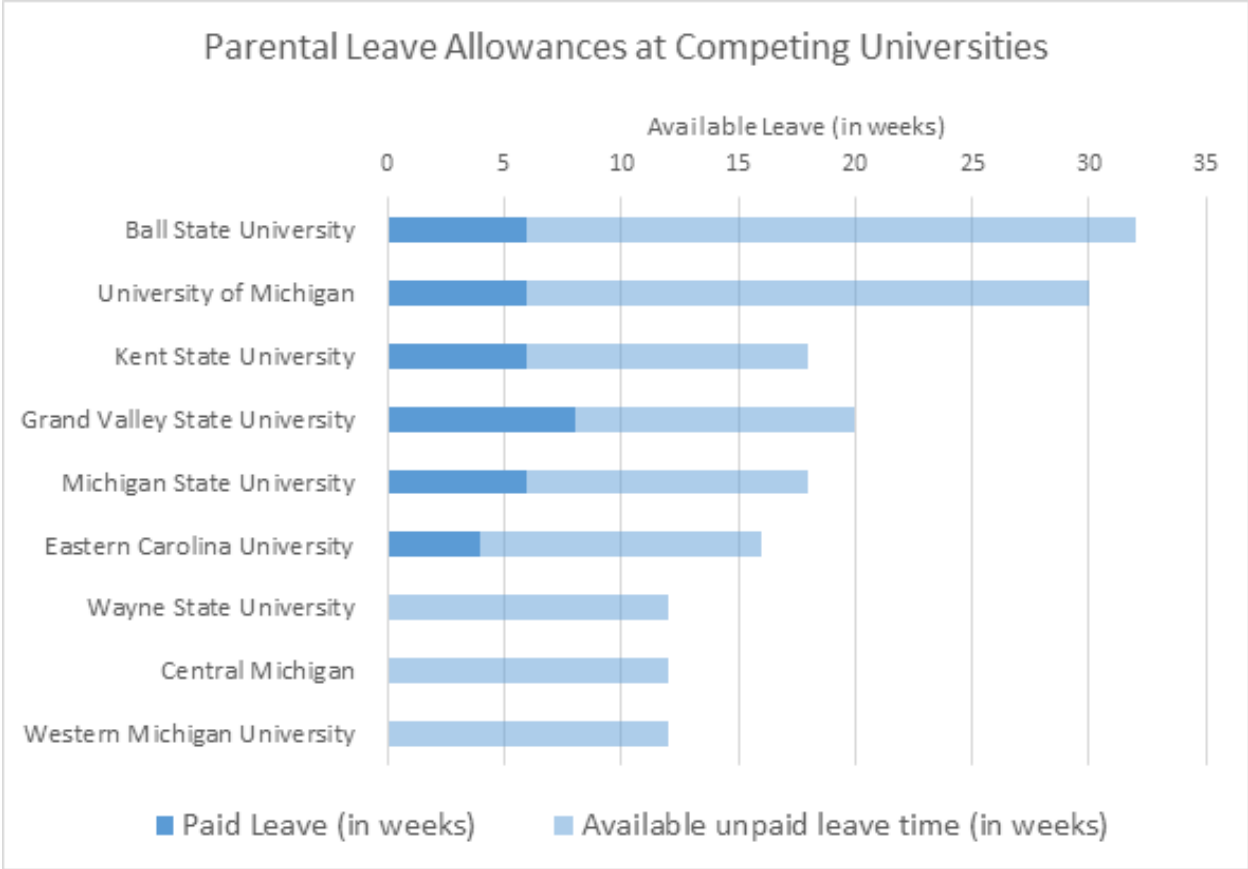
- Generally, family and medical leaves of absence are unpaid. However, paid leave (using sick leave or annual leave) may be an option.
- If enrolled in the University's health insurance benefits, these benefits will continue during the leave period.
  - If the leave is paid, health insurance premiums will be deducted from paychecks.
  - If the leave is unpaid, the University will bill employees for the health insurance premiums.
- If an enrolled in the University's life insurance plan (Additional 1 and Additional 2), employees may opt to discontinue life insurance during unpaid family and medical leaves. Please note: re-enrollment into discontinued life insurance will require evidence of insurability.
- For additional information about pay and benefits during a family and medical leave, see "pay during leave" and "benefits and seniority" at [Leaves and Absences from Work: Family and Medical Leave of Absence, Policies and Procedures Manual Section 13](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Family and Medical Leave of Absence (2014, July 15). Western Michigan University. Retrieved February 5, 2021, from <https://wmich.edu/hr/fmla>

# Benchmarking Competitor Policies

In order to be a leader in our field, we should know what our competitors are offering. We researched a few of our Carnegie and Michigan peers in Higher Education, as of February 2021, and here's what we found:



\*GVSU offers a variable 6-8 weeks paid leave, depending upon a number of variables.

\*\* MSU has approved a 6 week paid leave to start in 2023; current effectual policy is 4 weeks paid leave.

\*\*\* 12 weeks unpaid leave is the minimum requirement of FMLA. Anything beyond 12 weeks is a benefit of the university.

# Proposed Policy

Western Michigan University recognizes that supporting employees as they balance career, childbirth, and family life ultimately benefits the university. This paid parental leave policy regards family care concerns as legitimate and important. One goal of this parental leave policy is to make it more feasible for employees to remain in active employment at WMU during the birth of an employee's child or placement of a child for adoption.

## **Purpose**

The university will provide paid parental leave to employees to promote work life balance by providing eligible parents with the time needed to recover from childbirth, to care for and bond with their child, and/or to balance their professional and work obligations while adjusting to their new family environment.

## **Eligibility**

This policy applies to all eligible employees who are not in a recognized bargaining unit.

1. Paid parental leave is a benefit of employment and its use shall not have a negative impact on the employee's evaluation, promotion or employment status.
2. In order to be eligible for paid parental leave, an employee must have become a new parent as a birth parent, non-birth parent, an adoptive parent, foster care parent with legal custody or guardianship, or domestic partner for the purpose of caring for and bonding with a newborn, newly adopted child, or newly fostered child.
3. An employee be in benefits eligible position equivalent to or greater than a .50 appointment prior to the date paid parental leave is to commence.
4. One paid parental leave benefit is available per employee, per birth, adoption, or foster care placement event. The number of children involved does not increase the length of paid parental leave granted for the event.
5. Eligible parents who are both employed with the university are individually entitled to use paid parental leave.
6. There shall be no limit placed on the age of a newly adopted or foster care child for purposes of eligibility to utilize paid parental leave.

## **Paid Parental Leave General Procedures.**

1. An employee will be eligible for twelve weeks (480 hours) of paid parental leave.
  - a. Paid parental leave is paid at one hundred per cent of the employee's regular base rate of compensation at the time leave is taken.

- b. This paid leave will not reduce an employee's balance of accrued time under any other university paid leave program (e.g., sick time, vacation).
  - c. Lump sum allotments of paid parental leave are prorated based upon FTE.
  - d. Paid parental leave shall run concurrently with FMLA.
  - e. Paid parental leave will ordinarily be used on a continuous leave basis, but may be used intermittently subject to the same requirements, including the university's approval.
  - f. In the case of a stillborn child, the birth and/or non-birth parent are eligible for a maximum twelve weeks of paid parental leave which must be taken immediately following the birth and is provided in lieu of funeral leave.
2. An employee must provide the university with at least thirty days advance written notice of intent to use paid parental leave unless such notice is not practicable, in which case the employee must give notice as soon as practicable.
3. Paid parental leave must be used within twelve months immediately following the birth, adoption or fostering; except that paid parental leave may commence prior to the event when deemed medically necessary or required to fulfill the legal requirements for the adoption. The use of paid parental leave prior to the birth or adoption of a child must be pre-approved by Human Resources.
4. An employee who uses paid parental leave is required to return to full-time work for at least one full year, part-time work for at least two full years, or a combination thereof, following the conclusion of the paid parental leave. If the employee does not fulfill this obligation, he/she must reimburse the university for the compensation that he/she received during the leave. This requirement may be waived if the employee is unable to return to work due to a disabling medical condition, to care for a newborn with a serious medical condition(s), reduction in force, discharge, or other circumstances beyond the employee's control.
5. During the period the employee is using paid parental leave, there shall be no accrual of sick leave and/or annual leave.
6. If both parents are employed by the university, they may take the parental leave concurrently or at separate times.
7. Use of these parental benefits shall not adversely affect the employee's standing or consideration for future salary adjustments in any manner.

## Conclusion

**Thank you for considering our proposal to establish a high-quality paid family leave program that we can be proud of.** We've attached some additional documents that might be useful as you consider our proposal and we look forward to discussing next steps.

February 19, 2021

Dear Ms. Jan Van Der Kley and Dr. Warren Hills,

The members of the WMU-AAUP Association Council are pleased to support the 12-week Paid Family Leave policy for WMU, as proposed by the Administrative Professional Association. This policy aims to promote work-life balance for employees, while they adjust to a new family environment.

The Association Council of the WMU-AAUP, which comprises the Chapter representatives of all WMU units, strongly believes that the proposed policy would improve overall employee retention, productivity, inclusion, equity and fairness, as well as the competitiveness of WMU as an employer. We also understand that paid parental leave can increase employee morale, productivity, and labor force attachment, as a recent study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research demonstrates.

We take the opportunity to share a few words expressed by Governor Whitmer on October 1, 2020, upon granting 12 weeks of paid parental leave for all employees that work for the State of Michigan:

"As someone whose parents both worked in public service and who had both of my daughters while serving in the legislature, I know the type of commitment and dedication and family sacrifice required to get the job done, and I see that same commitment every day from our state workforce, which is why I am so pleased and happy to make this important new benefit available. The birth or adoption of a child requires time and effort at home, and state employees should rest assured that they will be able to take that time when they need it the most without having to worry about their paycheck."

In conclusion, the Association Council of the WMU-AAUP fully supports the adoption of the proposed Paid Family Leave policy at Western Michigan University.

Respectfully,

The Association Council of the WMU-AAUP

February 26, 2021

Dear Ms. Van Der Kley and Dr. Hills,

The Professional Support Staff Organization Executive Board is pleased to support the proposed Paid Family Leave policy for Western Michigan University. This proposed policy aims to promote work-life balance for employees, while they adjust to a new family environment.

Our group is dedicated to advocating for and supporting its members. The proposed policy would not only benefit the members of PSSO, but all WMU employees. Along with promoting a work-life balance, the proposed policy would improve overall employee morale, retention, productivity, inclusion, and the competitiveness of WMU as an employer.

In conclusion, the PSSO Executive Board fully supports the adoption of the proposed Paid Family Leave policy at Western Michigan University.

Respectfully,

WMU Professional Support Staff Organization Executive Board

Shannon Rininger, President  
Amber Hutson, Vice President  
Khanh Hoang, Treasurer  
Pat Wilcox, Secretary  
Kaycie James  
Karlee Pirrotta  
Cindy VanderWoude



2-28-2021

Dear VP Jan Van Der Kley and Dr. Warren Hills,

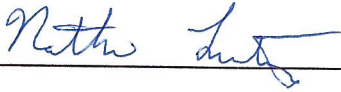
The members of the Western Michigan University Police Officer's Association are pleased to submit our support for the proposed Paid Family Leave policy for employees at Western Michigan University. This proposed policy aims to promote work-life balance for employees, while they adjust to a new family environment.

Our association believes the proposed policy would improve overall employee retention, productivity, inclusion, and the competitiveness of WMU as an employer.

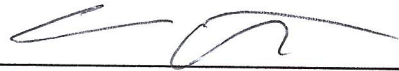
The Western Michigan University Police Officer's Association fully supports the adoption of the proposed Paid Family Leave policy at Western Michigan University.

Respectfully,

WMU POA Board



Nathan Lutz



Aaron Whittaker



Michael Cheadle



Michael Lininger

2/13/2021

Dear Ms. Jan Van Der Kley and Dr. Warren Hills,

The members of the WMU College of Arts and Sciences Women's Caucus are pleased to submit our support for the proposed Paid Family Leave policy for Western Michigan University. This proposed policy aims to promote work-life balance for employees, while they adjust to a new family environment.

The CAS Women's Caucus is dedicated to promoting an academic culture of inclusiveness at Western Michigan University in research, teaching, service and administrative work. The proposed policy would improve overall employee retention, productivity, inclusion, and the competitiveness of WMU as an employer.

The CAS Women's Caucus fully supports the adoption of the proposed Paid Family Leave policy at Western Michigan University.

Respectfully,

College of Arts and Sciences Women's Caucus

Anna Popkova *Anna Popkova*

Priscilla Lambert *Priscilla Lambert*

Mariana Levin *Mariana Levin*

Ilana Nash *Ilana Nash*

Alisa Perkins *Alisa Perkins*

February 22, 2021

Dear Ms. Jan Van Der Kley and Dr. Warren Hills,

The members of Western Moms United are pleased to submit our support for the proposed Paid Family Leave policy for Western Michigan University. This proposed policy aims to promote work-life balance for employee families, while they adjust to a new family environment.

Our group is dedicated to creating a community of support for mothers who are Western Michigan University employees. We aim to advocate for and improve the overall experience of mothers who are Western Michigan University employees, which aids in overall employee retention, productivity, and inclusion. The proposed policy advances our goals of supporting WMU mothers and families as they balance responsibilities of both employee and caregiver, which encourages active employment during critical family transition periods.

In conclusion, Western Moms United fully supports the implementation of the proposed Paid Family Leave policy at Western Michigan University.

Respectfully,

Western Moms United

## Paid Parental Leave Testimonials

“I am due to have my second child in early spring 2021. I have made every attempt to avoid taking any annual leave or sick leave since June 2020 when my annual leave renewed. . . . I have a six year-year-old and a life that requires me to be able to take time for the rest of my family. By banking my leave I will just barely have 6 weeks paid leave after my new baby is born. Then I will be completely out of Sick Leave and annual leave. What will I do when my six-year-old needs to go to appointments? Is it fair for me to rely on my husband to take all the other time to make sure she can get to those? Luckily my Annual Leave will renew in the summer – but not before my other leave runs out. This means I may have to take some time unpaid after six weeks.”

--Anonymous

“Asking employees to use Sick Leave and Annual Leave to cover the birth of a child is not supporting families. This is 2021 and we can do better. It is well known that the U.S. is behind in supporting new parents through paid leave – we have an opportunity to be leaders here. There is a reason the Governor adopted a 12 week paid leave plan – it is better for everyone.”

--Anonymous

“I started working half-time at K-College when I was 5 months pregnant. At that time, K provided 6-8 weeks of paid leave after birth or adoption, with no waiting period, for employees working at least .5 FTE. . . . I felt very supported by the college and appreciated the consistent income and ability to save SL for other medical issues. . . . Without the paid leave, I would have had to take unpaid leave after birth and for the other medical issues.”

--Anonymous

“We had originally planned to start trying to get pregnant in late 2020 early 2021. When COVID-19 hit and we were forced to drain our annual leave and sick leave it meant reevaluating our plans. . . . With hour reductions sick leave is building very slowly and now we aren’t sure if we risk not being able to have a child by waiting longer to try, risk not having enough leave at birth. . . ., or leaving WMU completely for a company that has better family centered policies.”

--Anonymous

“I gave birth to both of my children while employed by WMU. Before each birth, I had set up all of the appropriate paperwork to use the remainder of my sick leave then enter into FMLA (as required by WMU at the time) to take care of my children for 8 weeks after their births. I planned to save four weeks of FMLA leave for the copious after-birth appointments, well-child appointments, and the unexpected and unknowns that would happen for the coming year with a newborn. This process worked well for my first child, but for my second child this was not the case. The day before my scheduled induction, my father unexpectedly passed away. . . . I was not able to grieve my father’s passing and was not able to take time off to bond with my child and care for her beyond the 8 weeks I had scheduled. . . . The four weeks of saved FMLA were used quicker than I expected and I feared losing my job day after day until that date on the calendar told me that my job was secure by FMLA once again. . . . If I had paid parental leave, FMLA would have been used to treat my mental health more thoroughly in the weeks after my father’s death and my daughter’s birth. I was strictly relying on my doctors and care providers to work around my work schedule so I could save my family, my mental health and my job. . . . I am still dealing with PPD and PTSD four years later. I know that my life would look much different today if I had an employer that provided enough time off to care for the birth of my child.”

--Anonymous

## Paid Parental Leave Testimonials

“I married my husband in 2017 and before that we were living together. He would observe that I would rarely take sick time and that when I got a cold I might take one or two days maximum to get over the worst symptoms before returning back to work. He would get frustrated with this because it meant that I was bringing the virus into work and that it prolonged my illnesses because I didn’t take what he thought was enough time to rest. . . . it didn’t even enter into his mind that I had to be hoarding my sick days.

. . . If a new mother wanted to take her full 12 weeks of FMLA and use her sick days, that would be 60 sick days, which takes 4.6 years to accrue. That’s assuming you don’t use any of your sick days while accruing them. . . . Additionally, if you want to have more than one child you have to spend more time trying to hoard sick days while caring for a young child who is now getting sick themselves. It’s a lot of stress that women start thinking about years before they even become pregnant, and in my observations, I don’t think it’s the same with men.

After WMU added the 6 weeks of paid parental leave for AAUP faculty so much of that stress and mental calculations went away. . . . I felt more comfortable using my sick leave when I was sick because it wasn’t as precious a commodity, which is a good thing. Even after the major threats of Covid-19 are gone. . . there will be more emphasis on not coming into work with symptoms and if employees have to use their sick days up even more it will create even more stress for women who keep track of every hour they have to spend from their sick leave accrual.”

--Anonymous

“I dealt with various layers of policy that felt like they were working against me as my husband and I were starting our family. I was a temporary employee for approximately two years, so not benefits-eligible with my first son, and had to go unpaid for my entire leave. . . . I felt significant financial pressure to return after 7 weeks. With my second son, I became benefits eligible right at the start of my pregnancy, resulting in a denied long-term disability claim, which I was provided no HR support with. . . . My second delivery was a planned cesarean section, so again, a recommendation of 8 weeks leave for recovery, yet again I felt financial pressure to return after 7 weeks to allow my income to resume. . . . I was left feeling that I was being punished as an employee, in spite of maintaining high quality work, for deciding to start a family.”

--Anonymous

“In 2017, we were preparing to bring in our second daughter, and I worked out with my supervisor that I was going to use my sick leave and annual leave to take seven weeks off. I sent this plan to HR to find out that due to changes in the AAUP contract (which I am not a part of) I had to use FMLA concurrent with my sick leave and annual leave. I had concerns about this because I didn’t know what might happen during the birth and if I would need the FMLA on top of my sick leave and annual leave. . . . In June 2018, the [new] policy for staff was finally put into writing – 6 months after I was required to oblige to a policy that didn’t exist. We were told that this change was occurring to better align the policies in all pay groups – going back to the change in the AAUP contract. The Staff Compensation System policy still does not align with the AAUP contract because AAUP has parental leave. The justification HR used for changing the staff policy is not appropriate in that the policies do not align.”

--Anonymous

“I used to feel happy to work at WMU, but after my experience and having heard so many other parents’ struggles, I no longer believe WMU cares about me as an employee. I want to believe we are better than this. If WMU adopted a paid parental leave policy, it would make me so proud!”

--Anonymous

## **Paid Parental Leave Testimonials**

“Planning to take time off for maternity leave was so stressful as I tried to cobble together FMLA with sick and annual leave that had been carefully saved. I wanted to be excited about the arrival of our baby, but the anxiety and worry about not having enough paid leave seemed to overshadow everything. Due to WMU’s policy on administering FMLA, I had to split the 12 weeks with my spouse, who also works at WMU. Because I needed the recovery time after the birth, this meant my spouse had less time to bond with our baby, and was unable to spend more than a few weeks at home to support my recovery. Reliance solely on FMLA for parental leave hurts the entire family. Not everyone has the luxury to “save up” sick and annual leave, and not everyone can afford to take unpaid time off. We all deserve the right to bond with a new child and support our family without fear of financial hardship.”

--Anonymous